# THE HOME OF A NATURALIST

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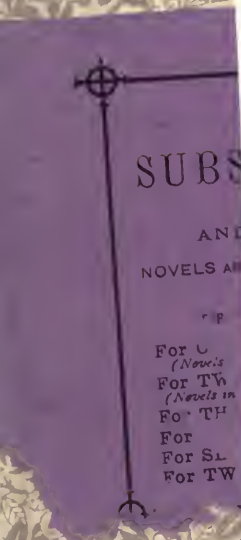


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# THE HOME OF A NATURALIST.

LAURENCE EDMONDSTON, M.D.

THE

# HOME OF A NATURALIST.

BY THE

REV. BIOT EDMONDSTON,

AND HIS SISTER,

JESSIE M. E. SAXBY.

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TO

THE MEMORY OF OUR PARENTS,

*LAURENCE EDMONDSTON, M.D.,*

AND

*ELIZA MACBRAIR, HIS WIFE.*

FATHER and MOTHER, vanished from this Home
To that which waits us in the Better Land,
From rock, and hill, from cloud, and breeze, and foam,
From life and legend, from the household band,
From that which made our native Hialtland dear,
We took betimes the Memories gathered here.

Amid the business, and the grief of Life,
The petty triumph, and the passing joy,
The haste, the pressing onward, and the strife,
We have found happiness without alloy
In calling from our Past such echoes sweet
As seemed to vagrant Fancy the most meet.

Father, who taught us in our early youth
To find a God in Nature's pages wide;
Mother, who led along the way of Truth,
And was our Heaven-sent pattern and our guide:
Parents, where ye await the dawn of Day
This tribute of our filial love we lay.

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# THE HOME OF A NATURALIST.

## *THE HOME OF A NATURALIST.*

It was a plain old building, and small. It resembled a Scottish farmhouse; and the fields which surrounded it, and the steading, showed that its master was somewhat of a farmer. He had scientific theories regarding agriculture, which he was always putting to practical test. Some succeeded beyond his expectations, others failed; not because Science "would not work," but because experiments done on so small a scale cannot pay Science; and then Ignorance, in the form of money-grubbing *practical* farmers, laughed at the Naturalist and his theories.

The house stood on a gentle slope, overlooking one of those land-locked fiords which characterise the Shetland Isles. Behind rose a tiny range of hills, whose varied peaks resemble those of the Cheviots. The house was, as I said, small and unpretending, more so than other houses in the place; but nevertheless, a stranger would have his attention attracted to it before all others, because its lawn and garden were surrounded by more than a hundred species of shrubs

and trees. In a land altogether treeless, this feature becomes at once a striking and most pleasing one. Every tree was planted by the Naturalist himself, with what cost and labour was known to him only. He watched over their growth with the fostering care of a parent, and thought the time and money he spent upon his little plantation well spent. When asked by the sneering money-grubbers: "Will that sort of thing make the pot boil?" he replied, smiling: "Certainly; nothing better than sticks for making the fire burn and the pot boil!"

But what was his joy to find, as the years went past, and his trees became acclimatised, that woodland birds were attracted by them, and finding both shelter and food, took up their abode among the kindly branches. Nor did the birds come merely as stray visitors, but as actual residenters. The chaffinch and woodpecker, the wren and the hedge-accentor—once but rarely seen, and then only as solitary wanderers—now colonised the shrubbery. The cross-bill, the rose-coloured pastor, the fieldfare, the mealy redpole, redstart, linnet, and blackbird, became familiar visitors. The Naturalist's heart rejoiced.

But there was one serious drawback to his delightful contemplation of the feathered woodfolk who had so graciously lighted among his greenery. If he loved birds, he also loved beasts, and of all beasts a cat was the delight of his soul. Now cats, like naturalists, take intense pleasure in crouching in quiet corners to watch the motions of winged creatures. To be sure,

the quadruped's motive for so doing is different from that of the man, and the result is tragically different too. It was the Naturalist's misfortune to see often a mangled minnesinger borne past him by the lithe grimâlkin that daily sat, sleek and gentle, upon his shoulder while he dined. She shared his meals, and had not the excuse of hunger for her cruelty. He kept more than one cat, and the havoc wrought by those house-tigers among the birds was too terrible. I suppose their master received compensation in the interesting indoor study which his felines afforded. He was always ready to excuse the cats on the plea that "it is their nature to;" but he did not fail to chastise them at the same time; and his rebuking was not without effect upon some of these bird-fanciers.

The house-pets knew, one and all, that the dinner-bell was a call to meals, and would flock from various parts of the house or fields to the dining-room door and window. Some were allowed to come into the room. More than once, a feminine chorus of remonstrance was raised by the ladies of the family, and the result was temporary banishment of the animals at meal-times; but the edict was seldom carried into force for more than a week, as even those who had been loudest in requiring their absence, missed their dependents so much, that tacit permission for their recall was given. A tax was levied upon every plate and dish before it left the table, a process which the interested animals naturally regarded as the great event of the hour. All dry crusts and small slices of bread

went into the Naturalist's pockets; and what pockets they were! They bulged out on each side; and their owner, when wandering about his fields, was usually attended by a motley throng of those who knew well what those pockets contained. Running about his feet after the manner of Skye-terriers was Rough, who had lost one eye, and never could bear the smallest allusion to his misfortune. Dogs do not parade their infirmities, nor will their self-respect permit them to claim either charity or indulgence because of misfortune. One or two cats stealthily kept pace with their master's slow step, seemingly unconcerned in all around, but very wide awake internally. An ox with its large tender eyes would appeal for a caress; while a pony would be shoving its frowsy brow against its master's shoulder, munching crusts with great satisfaction. Dickhalyer, a splendid gamecock, usually stalked dignifiedly by the Naturalist's side, as one who thought, and in his own way said: "You and I are reasoning beings, and must set an example of decorum to the lower animals." A flock of pigeons would hover over his head, sometimes alighting on any available part of his person. A hooded crow, in his handsome gentlemanly uniform of black and grey, accompanied the procession, taking notes. Some ducks would join it at intervals, though these not unfrequently quarrelled with the cats. Even gulls and cormorants occasionally helped to swell the group.

Benjamin, slight and pretty, with large thoughtful eyes, and the overwise ways of a boy whose life is

chiefly spent among grown-up people, would ofttimes slip his wee hand into that of the Naturalist, whose mind was never so absent that it could not be recalled by that touch. Then what talks they would have, to be sure! Not unfrequently an elfish girl, with thin pale face and restless gait, would add herself to the group, startling the more refined creatures by her abrupt motions, startling her father yet more by her metaphysical ideas upon every subject that ever stirred the thought of a mere human being.

On fine summer days, the Naturalist would often effect a disappearance by simply stretching himself at full length in a field of grass—tall rye-grass, where the corncrake delighted to nest, and over which the skylark loved to pour his melody. Very different the harsh cry of the one to the song of the other; yet the Naturalist loved the voices of both, and would spend hours in their haunts. One might almost have believed that he slept, so motionless he lay; but the girl aforementioned would at times invade his solitude, and she always found him gazing straight into the sky, or watching the movements of some insect creeping among the surrounding grasses. If happily he were "i' the vein," he would tell her what strange cloud-worlds he saw, and how they were peopled by the creatures of his imagination; and then his fancy would carry her beyond cloudland into the Unseen—almost, she thought, into the presence of the Creator; for Nature's God, he said, was best seen and known through His works. An insect losing its way, and

hurriedly creeping over his dress, would prompt some marvellous tale of the scientific world—tales that have all the charm of truth to recommend them. He always affirmed that insects were among the most intelligent creatures in the world. He delighted in the study of them. He would lay a beetle, or caterpillar, or earwig on his hand, and point out its beauties, until his girl would as soon have thought of shrinking from a flower as from a creeping thing. Spiders were great favourites; bees and ants a never-failing source of amusement.

During the summer months, his home in Ultima Thule was frequently visited by wandering "scientists," who were always heartily welcomed, and given every assistance in his power. He was at home on almost every branch of science, although he modestly prefaced any information he had to give with a disclaimer. Being an expert linguist, he could always converse with foreigners in their own tongue. It was amusing to observe the varied expression of different sorts of travellers when they were first introduced to his parlour. The snob looked unutterable disgust; the mere tourist stared his wonder and took notes; the man of science was full of curiosity; the lady rather frightened. It was a curious place, certainly. Over the mantelpiece hung useless flintlock fowling-pieces that had seen service in their day; also a variety of weapons in use among savage tribes; though how boomerang, tomahawk, lance, or arrow-tube got there, their owner only could tell. Among these were bunches of quills; clusters of pony-hair, that were very suggestive in such company,

of scalp-locks; some queer stones, fossils, and pretty shells. On the mantelpiece itself were books of every description, rising tier on tier, all well thumbed, yet frequently covered with dust, which had gathered there *not* by the usual mode, but through his experiments upon the coal and ashes in the grate. He had theories about fuel as well as about everything else; and some of the "notions" which were thought "so queer," are now being recognised as full of practical wisdom. The sideboard was crowded with medicine bottles and the chemical apparatus of his profession. The room, in truth, looked a picture of disorder, but in reality was not so, for its presiding genius knew the exact position of each book and bottle. It was only when others intruded themselves and belongings, that the reign of chaos began.

Besides that parlour, where he usually sat, the Naturalist possessed what his children called a den. A den it truly was. Oh, the marvels which came out of that place, and the curiosities and useful articles which disappeared into its depths! There is a tradition in the family that once the piled-up heaps were overturned, and a plough was discovered which had been amissing for years. In one corner of this den there hung a skeleton, which acted as a very effectual bugbear to over-curious children and servants. One shelf contained medicine bottles out of number, with brown-paper parcels, bones, and boxes. One parcel contained a portion of skin which had once covered the body of Burke the murderer, who had been dissected in Edinburgh by the

Naturalist along with other young medicals. Beside that gruesome relic lay a petrified stone from Mount Sinai. In a corner by itself lay a score of tiny shoes —the wee worn-out things which his little ones had shed. Some of the small feet which had pushed through the leather were lying still enough, after a brief time of restless trotting up and down; and the father hoarded these memorials of feet that were not meant to walk this earth.

Somewhere in the mysterious space in the roof was stored for some years a collection of stuffed animals, the gifts of well-known naturalists. These creatures were periodically put out on the lawn to air; and a queer sensation they produced there. The domestic animals took flight, all except the dogs, which showed fight at first; but soon learned that the fierce, wild beasts had long since ceased to claw. Unfortunately, the small house, crowded with children and other live dependents, had but sorry accommodation for the stuffed beasts, which in course of time began to look mangy to a degree. At last, some wise person suggested that the collection was decidedly "bad for people," and a bonfire was made of it. Armadillo, sloth, tiger, bear, and bison, surmounted by a boa-constrictor—whose internal arrangement of arsenical soaped stuffing had been leaking all about the place for months—made a grand pyre, round which the dogs and bairns bounced delightedly.

One especial book over which the children pored until the pictures became as familiar to their eyes as

each other's faces, was Bewick's "British Birds." The dear old volume, "sair worn," is now a cherished heirloom.

The Naturalist's home was visited by many of our great men. His brother the Laird also opened his door at all times to the stranger; and thus began friendships which were lifelong with many of the lights of the scientific world. It must have been a great pleasure to some of those men to hide, as it were, from the busy world for a short time in that sweet, wild, ocean-girdled bit of land. There they could prosecute the study of Nature without the distracting cares which surround less isolated homes. It must also have surprised them to find an intellect like his "buried" in the earth. Often he was asked why he chose to live there. He might have earned fame and wealth elsewhere, for he was a skilful physician, as well as a Naturalist second to few; but fame and wealth were not the objects of his ambition. Far dearer to him the facilities which Shetland offered for the contemplation of Nature and her many marvels. In the home of his choice, which was also the home of his birth, he could exercise a freedom of action such as he could enjoy nowhere else in Britain. He could wrap himself in his black Spanish cloak, or any sort of dress he pleased, and not be called odd. He could shut himself up, and refuse to be disturbed, without offending some powerful neighbour or patron. He could ride his pony everywhere, carry his researches where he pleased without meeting a warning to trespassers stuck up

by the way. In short, he preferred a natural happy mode of life to an artificial one, attended by earthly honour, dogged by earthly care; and so he remained in the little paradise he had created for himself.

When a young man, he was a keen sportsman; but he admitted that even when his love of sport was very great, he always had pangs of conscience after the game was bagged; and when the hunter's zeal was strongest, he never took the life of bird or beast without a good reason for so doing. In later days, he never used a gun. More than once, he had an old fowling-piece repaired, or he bought a new one, and hinted to his boys that he meant to show them he could shoot still; but he never fired a shot. The girl, who was always seeking from him the why and the wherefore for things seen and unseen, wondered, when she heard him tell of his youthful exploits with the gun, why he had lost that love of sport. The wondering at last shaped itself into a question; and she never forgot the look of anguish which swiftly crossed his face as, turning from her, he said: "You'll learn the reason when you are older, my bairn." She had often heard the sorrowful tale of a brother lost when she was little more than a baby. He had died through the carelessness of a companion, who had placed a loaded gun across the thwarts of a boat, and some one stepping on the lock, sent the charge through the poor youth's head—a most promising young man, scarcely past his majority. He had all his father's passionate love of natural science, and something more than his father's power of turning

his genius to the uses of everyday life. A son to make any parent's heart glad—gentle tempered, eloquent, persevering, brave, good. An author on Botany at fifteen, a Professor of the same at twenty, who can wonder that from the time he met so hard a fate, and was buried far from his home and kindred, that his father's sensitive nature shrank from the use of that weapon which had wrought such woe! The girl wondered no more, and her surmise was correct.

It must not be supposed that though the Naturalist spent much time in the calm contemplation of Nature, therefore his life was one of pleasure and ease. The work of a country doctor made his life no idle dream. Night and day he was at the service of the fisher population, who loved him for the skill he bestowed upon them, and yet more for the sympathy he showed in all their doings. Many a rare trophy drawn from the depths of ocean, and preserved by the men, not because they saw any value in a bit of coral or a queer shell, but because they knew that "the Doctor will be glad o' the like"—many a splendid dish of fish, many a well-knitted pair of socks or gloves, showed that his kindness was fully appreciated by his poor patients.

Yet, with all his manifold duties, he found time to study many books. He delighted in works of travel; and affirmed that Gordon Cumming's adventures would be found to be nearer truth than the world generally supposed. Later travellers have confirmed what poor Gordon Cumming said.

The first thing he did when coming down in the morning was to read and meditate over a chapter in the Bible. After that, he read a Dictionary! His children used to wonder how he could possibly find interest in so dry a book. No doubt it was the study of the Bible and Dictionary which made him speak and write such pure, true, and elegant English. At breakfast, the four-footed pets came in with the children, and all received a morsel of some dainty from the Naturalist's plate. Breakfast was a meal over which he delighted to linger, and only the apparition of some factotum whose patience was short-lived, saying, "If ye please, sir, I'm waiting for," &c., brought the meal to an end.

Although his manner was always grave, almost to severity, he loved to see others happy; and his children have no brighter recollections than of the long winter evenings, when he made his sweet-toned violin breathe such melody as only a master's hand can evoke from any instrument. Often he merely played dance-music, that the young people might enjoy what he called healthful recreation; but oftener they sat spell-bound while he played plaintive Scotch airs, stirring pibrochs, grand marches, soul-melting melodies, sacred music. Weber's Last Waltz was one of his favourite airs.

His domestic life had been deeply tinged by sorrow; but the great intellect, and yet greater heart, bore him through all, so that he retained in old age all the fresh feelings of younger days. His interest in the progress

of science was as keen after he had seen fourscore as it had ever been ; and although the number of his pets had decreased, they were not the less cherished when life became a vague dream of the past.

I went not long ago to the Naturalist's Home, to look again upon the place where he had lived and laboured, the spot of all others indissolubly associated with him, where he has left a never-dying memory. There were many changes about the old place, though rock and hill and northern sea change not, nor does the heaven above them; nor indeed did it seem as if the Naturalist himself were dead, for wherever I went, I seemed to see and hear him. The skylark was singing over his fields, and the corncrake uttered its quaint complaining among the grass, just as they did years agone when he lay and listened to them. But there were no interesting pets about the house—if we omit his grandchildren—only the necessary sheep-dog, cat, horse, fowl—characterless on the whole, because the wonderful tact of one who understood the nature of bird and beast was not there to evoke their reason, as it had done that of their predecessors. Some of the trees which he had fostered had grown a good deal, and had thrust their branches across the paths he had trodden smooth when wandering up and down, with bowed head, pondering over the mysteries of creation. I knew my way by those paths to the graves of his household; and I found his resting-place, quiet and solemn, under the shadow of his own trees, with birds he had loved piping on every spray, with no sound of

the busy world within reach. He rests there as he wished, beside the Love of fifty years.

As I thought of the long life which had found refuge from care, and comfort for sorrow, in that creation which was given by its Maker for the use of man, I recalled some lines by Longfellow, which seemed most appropriate to such reflections :—

"He wandered away and away
With Nature, the dear old nurse,
Who sang to him night and day
The rhymes of the universe.

"'Come wander with me,' she said,
'Unto regions yet untrod;
And read what is still unread
In the manuscripts of God.'

"And whenever the way seemed long,
Or his heart begin to fail,
She would sing a more wonderful song,
Or tell a more marvellous tale."

Then bending over that grave, I remembered his words: "God's book of Nature is the best book I know, and the most perfect revelation of His Fatherhood that can be desired. The man who can study Nature and not see a Father's love, care, wisdom, and direction in it, must be a man with intellect undeveloped."

OUR DOG PIRATE.

## *THE HEAD OF THE HOUSE.*

For a long series of years during the latter half of the last and beginning of the present century our grandfather, Laurence Edmondston, was the only doctor in the Shetland islands. And when you are told that in those days the only modes of locomotion were on foot or pony-back or by boat, you will easily understand that in attending his patients the doctor's work was most arduous. It also often involved no small danger. But indeed "attendance," in the popular sense of the term, was scarcely possible. This is how the practice was carried on. A member of some laird's family would fall ill; an express was sent for the doctor—the express being, in nine cases out of ten, a six-oared boat. From many miles distant the summons would come. The doctor would pack up his medicine-chest and start on the long and often perilous journey. A week's—it might even be a month's—sojourn under the hospitable roof of the laird would follow, and during that time all who had ailments in the neighbourhood would flock to the doctor for medical aid and medicines. There he would frequently remain until another urgent call by the inevitable sixaerin would arrive from some other island.

Our father, the "Naturalist" of the last chapter, bore his father's name; followed his profession, and in 1824 settled in Baltasound, Unst, the most northerly island of the Shetland group, where an elder brother, Thomas, the laird of Buness, resided.

The laws of heredity were very marked in our race. There had been naturalists and physicians in the family for generations, and they had had a free and most favourable field for the pursuit of science in their native isles.

The following quotation from our father's writing will show that "the family-craze" went hand-in-hand with that more romantic but not less ennobling passion, Love of Home:—

"Who that has ever looked upon them can forget these naked and primitive isles of the Northern Atlantic —their melancholy moors and lonely valleys—their stupendous precipices and foaming surges, lowering clouds, and rushing maelströms, where the ancient lullaby of the infant Viking was the hurricane, and his play-ground the ocean! In these wild and sequestered solitudes, unbroken by the tumults of faction and the inroads of civilisation, is to be found that untrammelled freedom about which philosophers reason and poets sing; and it is well to refresh ourselves, in this agitated period of the march of matter, with those pure and ennobling sentiments which the presence of Nature in her sublimer aspects is calculated to inspire."

Baltasound is a fine land-locked bay or fiord on the

*Frontispiece.* BALTASOUND.

"These naked and primitive isles."—*Page* 16

east side of Unst. It runs inland from two to three miles, with an average width of less than one mile. Right across its opening, and considerably overlapping the rocky points of Skeotaing on the south, and Swinaness on the north, stretches the narrow island of Balta, forming a magnificent natural breakwater, and completely protecting the bay from the swell of the North Sea. The sound between Swinaness and the north end of Balta is narrow and not a safe entrance for vessels, except when wind and tide are fair. The south sound, on the other hand, is a mile broad, the water deep, and throughout entirely free from sunken rocks, so that it forms a safe and deep access to the bay (or Voe, as it is called), where the anchorage is excellent.

The shores of Baltasound are low, and the land slopes gently backward to the foot of surrounding hills.

Near the head of the Voe, on the north side, and only a few hundred yards from the water's edge, stands what was our father's home, Halligarth, containing not a great many rooms, but somehow always capable of extraordinary expansion when the wandering stranger required accommodation. Here our father lived for well nigh fifty years, and here at the age of eighty-four he died. His life in this remote locality was a most useful one, and that, after all, is the noblest distinction a man can earn. Of his profession he had a very profound and thorough knowledge, always keeping well abreast of the progress of the day in medical

science. He took the liveliest interest in his patients, and attended the poorest from whom he could expect no remuneration as assiduously, and dispensed to them medicines as liberally, as though they had been dowered with ample fortunes and could pay handsome fees.

On occasions, when he was visiting neighbouring islands professionally, if in summer, he would usually take with him his fowling-piece, as well as a small stock of medicines, and after the duties of the day were over he would spend some hours of the afternoon in hunting seals amongst the numerous neighbouring island holms and skerries, in rambling along the shores in search of rare birds or in botanizing. Thus he was often able to combine pleasure with his professional avocations, and to prosecute those studies in natural history to which he was passionately devoted.

An intense admirer of Nature, of a closely logical intellect, and at the same time of a deeply reverent spirit, Natural Theology was a study in which he delighted. I quote the following from one of his commonplace books: "The pleasure of enjoyment is nearly equalled by the pleasure of constantly and habitually referring it to the beneficent agency of our Creator. This habit of recognising and adoring Him at all times is itself a heaven on earth."

One of our father's favourite walks was along the north shore of Baltasound to Swinaness, and the lofty precipice of "The Keen" there, and his elder two boys were often his companions. On these occasions the conversation was very commonly about Nature

and Natural History. I well remember on one such occasion picking up and bringing to him a lovely white feather which had dropped from the wing of a sea-gull. He took it reverently in his hand, looked at it long and lovingly, and then said—"Boys, come here"—and there, sitting on the brow of the high cliff, while the swelling, moaning, ever-restless ocean waves were breaking into white foam amongst the rocks many hundred feet below, and "far in the dewy cloud" the skylark was pouring forth his sweet song of "unpremeditated art," and multitudes of sea-birds were screaming in wild discord round their nests in the precipice, he pointed out all the exquisite beauties, and explained all the parts of a feather, and showed how admirably it was adapted for its purpose in strength, lightness, and flexibility. Our special attention he directed to the little hooks which so tenaciously hold its filaments together, and re-unite them when separated. These we closely examined through his powerful pocket microscope. Then holding out the feather at arm's length he said, "I have always regarded a feather as one of God's most beautiful and admirable designs."

Our father regarded the study of insects and creeping things of every description as in the highest degree interesting and fascinating. He delighted in insects and insect life, in watching their transformations and observing their habits. Well do I recollect the first time he showed us a number of specimens he had prepared for the lens of a powerful microscope.

The leg and foot of a fly, the armour-plates of a beetle, the head of a spider, the wing of a bee, and many other preparations of a similar sort, were closely inspected by us, and need I say how enraptured we were with the marvels and beauty thus revealed. I think we were most of all charmed with the wing of a butterfly, to the minute and delicate feathers of which our attention was specially drawn, and we were asked if we could conceive anything more lovely. Many a delightful story he wove of insect history and progress to maturity, their loves and feuds, their campaigns and cunning stratagems, their battles and doughty deeds and hunting expeditions, which was as instructive as entertaining. Many an hour of the long winter evenings was devoted to this sort of story telling. The early three o'clock dinner over, the lamp not yet lit, the young ones, boys and girls, would gather around the glowing fire, and after a whispered consultation, one would entreat, "Tell us a story, please do." "A story," would be the reply. "Well, what shall it be about? Let me see—suppose I tell you the story of a famous beetle, will that do?" "Yes, yes, that will be capital," would come from the eager audience. And then the grave, sweet voice would begin. "Once upon a time there lived a beetle"—and so for an hour or longer, the history and adventures of that beetle, certain to have "a local habitation and a name," would be narrated in a manner so interesting and realistic that our sympathies would follow him through every incident of his chequered career, moving us to laughter

over what was comic, to enthusiasm over some heroic action or splendid victory, and even to tears over some tragic episode; but throughout the narrative we were learning all about the natural history of beetles in general. On other evenings the stories would be about a butterfly, or ant, or spider, or bluebottle.

In his earlier life our father was a keen sportsman and capital shot; but he was too much a lover of animals wantonly to deprive them of what he was wont to call "the luxury of life." Life in the meanest of God's creatures he regarded as a sacred thing of which man had no right, except for some good and useful purpose, to deprive them. Anything therefore which savoured of cruelty to any living creature roused his wrath and indignation, and brought down upon the offender a stern rebuke which he was not likely soon to forget. I at least have not forgotten a lesson I was taught when a very small boy. I had caught a fly and proceeded to dismember it, pulling off one leg after another and then the wings. My father coming into the room at the moment caught me red-handed. "For shame!" he said, "how can you be so cruel to the poor innocent fly?" Then fetching his microscope he inserted the mutilated remains under the lens and made me look at the still quivering members. "Do you see that," he said, "and do you think the poor fly does not feel? It does feel just as much perhaps as you would feel, if I were tearing your legs and arms from your body. I hope you are sorry for this, as I am; but never, never let me see you or hear of you

torturing any creature, even a fly. Remember God made the fly as well as you. He made it beautiful, and cares for it, and meant it to be happy, and it was happy, but you have tortured it and killed it. Go and remember that life is God's gift, and it displeases Him to take it away wantonly."

It was no doubt in great measure owing to this tender regard for life in every creature however humble, to his intense love of the lower animals, and to the high estimate which close observation and study led him to form of their intelligence and reasoning powers, that he could never adopt the belief that "the spirit of the beast that goeth downward," passeth to annihilation. He was wont to marshal a long array of very strong argument and cogent reasons in support of the theory of their immortality, held also by many other able and good men.

I find the following note in his commonplace book, written on the occasion of the death of an old and favourite cat: "Two days ago my poor cat died suddenly from rupture of a blood-vessel in the lungs. A finer, nobler animal of the kind never lived, twelve or thirteen years old, in high plight. In enduring affection to me, in sagacity, he was superior to most dogs, and most useful as a mouser. I never had an attachment for any animal so strong as for him, and still to-day I can't get him out of my mind. I am perfectly dull and distressed. Our regret at the loss of a favourite of the lower animals is unalloyed by any speck of moral evil, and by the uncertainty we are in as

to their future destiny. The loss appears to be eternal, though reason strongly testifies to the contrary."

A week later he writes, "Oh, my poor Puss! I cannot get him out of my head. I never shall look on his like again in the shape of any animal for warm and definite affection to me, and for sagacity combined. We cling to such, more especially when in our own species we find little but selfishness and hostility."

We were a large family and almost all of us had "hobbies" of some sort. Indeed we got great encouragement from our father to ride hobbies. He was a great believer in them, as affording innocent recreation and occupation for youthful energies at leisure-time; and so helping in no small degree to keep restless young feet and hands and brains from mischievous or dangerous pursuits. Botany was the hobby of one, ornithology that of another, gardening a third, "beasts" a fourth, and so on. For myself I affected mechanics, my labours and progress in the use of tools culminating in the great triumph of manufacturing, with a little help from an obliging neighbour, a small pleasure-boat, which proved an excellent sailer, and of capital sea-boat qualities. The boards were sawn out of a log of Norway pine, which I had found floating in one of the gyos on the east side of Balta, and secured at some risk. The sails were cut and sewed by myself and brother, and the whole rig was our own unaided handiwork.

It was a proud and memorable day when the *Marie* was christened and launched and went forth

on her first trial trip. She was found to be perfectly docile under command, and altogether to behave on the water in the most satisfactory manner.

In his management and upbringing of his family our father was most indulgent. He made friends and companions of his children, and by his never-failing sympathy with them in all their pursuits won their confidence no less than by his great attainments, consistency of character, reasonableness and impartiality, he commanded their implicit respect. Every liberty within reasonable and innocent limits was allowed us, and very seldom was recourse had to punishment. Whatever might happen or be done through mere youthful thoughtlessness, waywardness, or inadvertence, was lightly passed with an admonition. Only for palpable disobedience to express and clearly defined commands, or for anything approaching to prevarication, did we incur inevitable and stern chastisement, which effectually impressed upon us the desired lesson. Himself truthful and straightforward in every word and action, any description of deceit was abhorrent to him as mean, cowardly, and unmanly, and he inculcated upon his children before everything else the strictest observance of what he was wont to call "pellucid truth." In a few matters which may appear to some of no great consequence, but were considered by him as very important, he was most particular, and to his orders in regard to them he enforced the strictest obedience. For one thing he made it a rule in the house that no vessel containing hot liquids—tea-pot, tea-cup,

kettle or water-jug, should be carried or handed over any one's head or legs, or over any animal. Our domestics were not often changed, but whenever a new one did arrive it was one of our father's first orders that she must observe this most excellent rule. I remember a new housemaid who had more than once been checked and reproved for forgetfulness of this rule, being taught it in a manner well calculated to impress it upon her memory. She had brought into the dining-room a tea-kettle containing boiling water, and oblivious of the presence of a cat basking on the hearth-rug, she passed the kettle *over* him, and set it on the hob. "Jane," said our father, with preternatural solemnity, which her conscience warned her was the prelude to some well-merited and terrible rebuke. "Jane, take the kettle away, and see if it is possible that you can bring it in without danger to life, as I have directed you several times."

Jane, flustered and abashed, executed a retrograde movement, carrying back the kettle to the door; and then returned with it, and deposited it in place according to the regulation form,—the doctor severely looking on. Need I say that after that the girl was very careful never to offend in a similar way, and subject herself to what she seemed to regard as a humiliating performance.

Another rule was never to leave any cutting or sharp-pointed implement, or work with a needle sticking in it, on a chair. If any one transgressed this rule, the article was removed to a drawer in our father's

"den," where it reposed in peace until the delinquent repented, and sued for the confiscated property. A needle in such cases was always ruthlessly thrown into the fire.

Another rule which he enforced very strictly upon us boys, and which he never permitted us to transgress without suffering severely for it was—never to point a gun, or handle it in such a way, as that its muzzle should point at any person.

I don't refer to *real* guns after we began to use them. The lesson of caution was taught us, and the habit formed, when we were mere children, five or six years old, with nothing more dangerous than toy guns rudely constructed by ourselves out of a piece of wood. Such weapons we possessed, and if ever we were so forgetful as to break the rule referred to, they were instantly taken from us, and only restored to us some weeks afterwards on our solemn promise to be more careful in future. Also when walking about with our not very formidable or awe-inspiring imitations of fire-arms, our attention was constantly directed to the manner of carrying them so as never to allow the muzzle to cross in the direction of any one's person. "Be careful, keep up the muzzle of your gun!" was the usual formula. The consequence was, our father found it safe to allow us to use real firearms at a very early age. If we had ever been known to transgress the child-learned law, I am very sure a fowling-piece would have been promptly and peremptorily forbidden for an indefinite period.

Every one will recognise the wisdom of a rule of this sort. We thus acquired a *habit* which has stuck to us through life. In the most exciting moments of real sport, our father's rule is to this day instinctively observed by his sons. If such a rule as this were enforced upon boys, until the habit is formed which will make them shudder even to see a gun pointed at any one, how many lamentable accidents would be avoided! How many life-long agonies of self-upbraiding over awful tragedies, occasioned by gross carelessness or reckless joking with firearms, would be spared! If it is proverbially dangerous to play with sharp-edged tools, it is to the full as dangerous, nay more, it is criminal to joke with firearms.

I would therefore insist upon the infinite importance of children being trained to observe in the nursery and playground the same strict habits of self-control, method, caution, courtesy, and observation as they would do in later years regarding the more serious things of life. One of our father's favourite maxims was the well-known one, "Habit is second nature," and he taught that early habits are the foundation of principles good or bad, and that from habit is evolved virtuous or vicious characteristics.

The experience of life has taught me the philosophy of this, one of the earliest and wisest of his lessons.

## *THE DOCTOR.*

It was in dark December. The day had been unusually gloomy and threatening, the sky thick with heavy leaden-coloured clouds, and the barometer falling rapidly. All weather indications foreshadowed an approaching storm. As evening advanced the wind rose till it blew from the north with hurricane violence; and when night closed in, snow fell heavily and was drifting into great wreaths.

We were gathered around the dining-room table and fire. Our mother was busy with her needle over some garments of the little ones now asleep in their cots upstairs. The eldest son of the house was arranging some of his beloved plants in his herbarium. I with lead pencil and paper was copying from that most precious repository of delight to us juveniles, Bewick's British Birds. Our father, as was his frequent wont, was playing on his violin, with exquisite feeling and execution, as he could so well do. Very comfortable and cosy it was, although every now and then a fiercer blast than usual would shake the house as with an earthquake.

It was a little past ten o'clock when we were all startled by a sudden loud rapping at the back door.

Presently the maid appeared, and announced that two men wanted to see the doctor.

"Show them to my room," said our father, rising and laying his violin on the sideboard. We ceased our several occupations, and began to speculate. Some one must have been taken suddenly ill, or an accident must have happened somewhere, to bring messengers so late at night, and on such a night.

Our first conjecture was that a shipwreck had occurred somewhere on the rocky coast, and perhaps some of the sailors were hurt and required surgical aid. In a few minutes our father returned.

"What is it?" said our mother anxiously; "has anything happened? I hope you won't have to go out in such weather."

"I am afraid I must," was the grave reply; "a poor Fetlar man, in landing from his boat this afternoon, has got his leg broken and crushed, and is bleeding badly. I must go at once."

"But is it possible for any boat to cross the sound with such a storm raging?" asked my brother.

"Perhaps not," said our father, "we shall see when we reach the sound side. Possibly by that time the weather may have moderated At any rate, I must go so far, and cross if it is at all practicable; the poor fellow might die from loss of blood if I don't go." Then ringing the bell he gave his orders. "Have Herman saddled; give the men some food and warm tea, and be quick about it." In a few minutes he had got together his surgical instruments and appliances,

ran upstairs and kissed his little ones, hauled on his ample riding overalls, threw on his capacious heavy pilot-cloth cloak, and was ready for the journey. "Good-night," he said cheerfully, "I hope to be back sometime to-morrow."

We accompanied him to the door. "Take care," said our mother anxiously, and with a little tremor in her voice. "I hope you won't run any unnecessary risk."

"I won't," he replied, "but you know we are all in God's good hands on land or sea." And then mounting his trusty shelty, he set out accompanied by the messengers. A six-miles' ride over rocky, treeless, roadless hills brought them to Uyeasound, near the south extremity of Unst, where the six-oared boat from Fetlar, manned with hardy fishermen, was in waiting. It was not without much consultation, hesitation, and misgiving, that it was determined to risk the passage. No time was to be lost, as it was just the "slack of the tide"—the brief period between flood and ebb tide when the currents cease their wild race amongst the islands. In a short time, when the ebb tide would set in and be running furiously down Blummelsound, it would be utterly impossible for any boat to cross. By this time the snow was not falling so heavily, but came now rather in fitful showers. The wind, however, was little abated. But a human life was at stake, and our father was the last man in such an emergency to shrink from the danger he was encountering. None knew that danger better than he,

but he always had unbounded faith in the sea-boat qualities of a Shetland sixaerin, and in the consummate skill of Shetland boatmen in managing it. Carefully seeing that the boat was well ballasted and equipped, he stepped on board. A small closely-reefed sail was hoisted, and away the buoyant little craft flew before the gale, heading for a safe landing-place in Fetlar some six or eight miles distant. I was afterwards told by the helmsman that, although he had been at sea in many a fierce storm, he had never been so near being engulfed as he was several times on that memorable night.

Meantime we at home were kept in great anxiety. Next day little snow fell, but the wind blew nearly as hard as ever. Night came, but no word of or from our father arrived; and another day dawned and still no news. It was a dreadful time for us. We could endure the harrowing suspense no longer, and so shortly after noon my brother and I—stout, hardy lads, who were well accustomed to rough weather and stormy seas—set off for Uyeasound, to seek for some intelligence. Arrived at the sound side we found, rather from the anxious and troubled looks of the men than from much they said, that a very general fear was prevailing amongst them that the doctor and boat's-crew had been swallowed up in the raging sea. One old weather-beaten salt, whose opinion we asked, was evasive and gave not much encouragement. "There was," he said, "no better seaman in Shetland than the helmsman. If any man could handle a boat in a storm and heavy

sea he could, and she seemed a strong boat and seaworthy. But there were some dreadful squalls shortly after they left." Another said, "I don't know what to think. If they got safely across I consider they might have been back, for there have been several lulls in the storm; but of course, the wind being contrary, they may be safe enough, but find it dangerous to return. God grant it may be so. You must keep up your heart and hope for the best."

Towards evening the wind moderated somewhat, and the sky cleared up, but the waiting and suspense had by this time become intolerable. At last my brother said to some of the fishermen lounging about the quay, "Lads, will any of you man a boat and run us down to Fetlar?" "Ay, that we will," said a dozen of those brave fellows. And one added, "We can go now without great danger, and will if we should not get back for a week. It is before the wind, and we can go there though they may not be able to beat or row in its teeth."

Very speedily a boat was manned and ready. Just before starting a happy thought occurred to my brother, ever tenderly mindful of the anxious heart at home. "Lads," he said to those standing on the quay, "if they are all safe and we can't get back to-night, we shall light a fire over there in Fetlar which you will see if it keeps clear. We'll somehow get enough peats for that, and if you do see it, it will be a signal that all is well. You must then send a messenger instantly to my mother with the news, and

tell her that there is no cause for anxiety. We may not be able to get back for some time, but she will know that we are all alive and safe. Will you be sure to do this, like good fellows?" "Ay, that we shall," was the ready reply. "The Lord gang wi' ye, and send good news."

Arrived at Fetlar we learned to our unspeakable joy that the boat had reached land in safety, although the passage had been a terrible one, that the doctor had come not a moment too soon, and that his patient was now doing as well as could be expected, although exceedingly weak from loss of blood, and not out of danger. And didn't we then just with a will and in the highest of good spirits kindle up a magnificent blaze on the Fetlar shore, to convey the good news across to Unst. Although late at night, a messenger was immediately sent to Halligarth, where, as may be supposed, he was much made of, and feasted right royally with the best the house contained; but with gentle firmness he declined to receive two shining half-crowns which were pressed upon his acceptance. "Na, na," said the good-hearted fellow, "I'll no tak' a penny. I'm ower blithe ta' ha' sic gude news o' the doctor to bring. I never thocht ta' see his face again, but noo we ken he's safe, and the Lord be thanked."

It was indeed a happy thought that of the beacon, for storm and snow came on again worse than ever, and it was three days before we could venture to recross the sound.

## *OUR MOTHER'S ROOM.*

It was a marvel how that room, by no means large, held all that was in it, and yet left space for people to move,—yes, and for children to romp!

There was a cupboard in the corner by the door wherein was stored many choice "bits" that came out at opportune moments as rewards or compensations. An act of childish self-denial is marked in recollection by a cluster of raisins from that cupboard, and a scalded arm was not a little comforted by sundry cakes and sweets from the same place. When the "calabash" (a wooden box of foreign manufactory, quaintly carved and shaped) was lifted from its place in the cupboard, small persons had pleasurable anticipations.

The window-seat was a long, low, mysterious chest, covered with sealskin and ornamented with brass nails. The hair was much worn from the skin, and the hide itself hung in flaps at the sides. The nails on the lid, marking the initials of some long-gone ancestor, had many gaps in their lines. The box suggested to a reflective mind thoughts of coffins that have lain for centuries on vault-ledges! Although the children loved to play upon it, they yet held the "sealskin box" in respect, for none of them had ever seen it opened. Our

father kept the key, and whenever he approached to open it the children were all banished from the room. They had a burning curiosity regarding it which he aggravated by affecting yet more mystery on the subject.

Of course they learned when older that the old chest held nothing more remarkable than business-papers, family relics, and portions of dress; also certain surgical instruments which the damp climate necessitated being kept in a dry warm place. But I think some of the young folks regretted being disillusioned regarding the mystery of the sealskin box. Besides serving the purposes of Bluebeard's cupboard and window-seat, that box was where a culprit did penance.

To sit there for a stipulated period, idle, and in disgrace, was considered severe punishment, and I have no doubt those times of enforced "being still," when restless brains and fingers were burning for active service, saw many a nail surreptitiously abstracted, many a bunch of hair pulled out, many a hole in the hide widened,—all pertaining to the sealskin box.

First of the furniture, first because largest and most important, was the great tent-bed. It was like a chamber itself, and one could imagine pillows, babies, and the like getting lost in it. When the children's belongings went amissing they were first sought for "in mamma's bed," and if not discovered there it was generally believed that they had been removed to our father's "den"—a bourne from whence no traveller returned, unless by little short of miracle.

When any of the children were suffering from childish ailments they thought the trouble less when they were laid on their mother's bed, and later they comforted their maturer minds and bodies in the same way.

It was a vast couch indeed, and when the curtains were drawn its vaulted roof seemed peopled by ghosts. But all day the drapery was put back, and any one who pleased might sit or recline thereon. Even when the mother was too ailing to leave her bed, some one or other found excuse for being there too.

A little table stood beside the bed on which lay her knitting, pen and ink, Bible, Keble's "Christian Year," and, alas, too often numerous medicine bottles.

We have stood times out of number by that bedside in her moments of extreme suffering; but even when pain was keenest we never heard her murmur against what God had seen fit to permit her to endure. And when the agony abated she was always ready to smile at us again. Her submission was the more remarkable because she was intolerant of physical pain, and she was by nature impulsive and full of energy.

When the old home-band was scattered, and the "household gods" were following the children's example, one of us—impulsive and energetic like the mother—took the old tent-bed (infirm on its legs, worm-eaten throughout) to pieces, piled its dismembered bones together on a spot where the children had been wont to play, and set fire to them!

There was a small wooden box that had place for many years under the foot of the bed, and in the course of time this box began to look leaky at the corners and temptingly easy to open, for the lid was very loosely nailed down.

Our father had written on the top "Sacred to the Memory of my Beloved Parents," and that was enough to arouse the curiosity of any young person; but when they learned that the contents of that box were love-letters, their longing to remove the lid became insupportable.

In an evil hour when our parents were entertaining visitors, and some of their younger offspring were rampaging about our mother's room, that box was hauled out, and a tug from a boy's strong hand laid bare the contents.

One of the faded letters and then another was read, and the graceless young hearts were utterly touched by the beautiful sentiments, the courteous tenderness by which the old-fashioned gentleman, of a more manly age than the present, addressed his intended wife as "My dearest *Miss* Mally," and signed himself "with utmost respect, your devoted lover."

Our mother was afterwards informed of the audacious raid which had been made upon those interesting documents, and the love-letters disappeared for ever—all except one which she kept, and gave to one of us who had grown wise enough to value it aright.

There was usually a small bed in the corner of the room for a "sick or sorry" child, and it was seldom

without an occupant. Many times has one stirred in troubled sleep to find a tender soft hand upon the fevered head, and tender soft eyes looking down in maternal pity upon the little sufferer.

An old bureau of dark wood, uncompromisingly grim and square of build, stood against the wall; its pigeon-holes and drawers cramful of all those miscellaneous odds and ends which we call "relics" when they belong to ourselves, but which we designate "rubbish" when possessed by people in whose family history we take little interest.

It was the delight of our lives when our mother would take out a trinket, a lock of hair, an old letter, a quaint bit of dress, and tell us all about them.

What romances of real life, some humorous, some pathetic, were then unfolded! what lessons she taught with all she told!

That bureau could not hold all that it ought to have held, so for a few years a new chest of drawers occupied a place in the room, but it always looked an alien among the old furniture, was never comfortable, never seemed to fit any spot it was placed in, was frequently shifted to what was hoped would be a more suitable part of the room, finally was relegated to the guest-chamber by household suffrage, and "Auntie Martha's" bureau took its place.

The "bulyament-box" was a great institution, and always stood in some handy place ready to disgorge its contents whenever a boy's garments wanted patching, or a girl's doll required new raiment. Bleeding fingers,

bruises, burns, found suitable bandages in the bulyament-box. Sails for toy-boats, patches for quilts, covers for torn books, came out of that wonderful receptacle. And the most wonderful thing about it was, that though constant demand was made upon it the bulyament-box never was less than full of scraps.

Our mother was once asked to solve this riddle, and she said, laughing, "You wear and *make* rags and scraps as fast as you want them!"

Less important in the children's estimation than the bureau and the bulyament-box, but doubtless dearer to our mother than both, was the "Büest." This was an oval box, prettily carved and stitched (as it were) together by withes. The bottom was neatly fitted in a groove, the lid was kept in place by an ingenious contrivance of sticks. There was not a nail in it, and the Büest was of Norwegian manufacture. In it our mother kept her baby-gear. Some of the caps and dresses were much the worse of wear, having enfolded one after another eleven "Troublesome pleasures" (as she laughingly styled all babies).

The christening robe had been one of her wedding-gowns, and was made of finest "lauri," richly embroidered. Some of those white garments had gone into coffins with the fair small bodies that she had borne and loved. So the Büest had a cherished place in our mother's room.

The first defined recollections which remain with me, from the visionary life of early childhood, are the following. Our mother sat in her old arm-chair by

the hearth in her room. Her writing-table, darkened by age, dented by the ill-usage of many children, stood close by. On it a lamp beside an open Bible. A group of children were around her repeating texts and hymns. Then she drew the Bible nearer and called me to her side. Turning the leaves at random she bade me read, and I can remember how my heart fluttered as I read passage after passage wherever her finger pointed. I had been promised a Bible of my own when able to read it; so I had I suppose (for I was only four and a half years old, and have no remembrance of how, or when, I learned to read) been studying hard, and the time had come when my powers were to be tested.

I heard the elder sister, who had been my young foster-mother, say, "She *can* do it."

Then I was directed to read all of the chapter beginning, "Let not your hearts be troubled. Ye believe in God: believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions."

I must have bungled through it somehow, but my mother was satisfied, for she closed the Book and said, "That is very well, Jessie."

I was struck even then by her using my Christian name, and by the tone in which she said it, for I was usually called by pet names and scarcely knew my own. Then she rose, and laying a hand on David's shoulder, crossed to where the old bureau stood. Many years before she had had a terrible accident which had caused lameness, and she always required to use a "staff of support." I seem to see her now, as she

moved painfully forward, tears falling silently down her cheeks, her figure draped in black, a Shetland shawl gathered around her, the matronly cap of olden times set upon her luxuriant hair, her beautiful face wearing a sad yet sweet expression.

What a contrast her appearance (as *I* first remember it) from what it must have been twenty-four years earlier, when—a happy, high-spirited girl—she came to make the "melancholy Isles" her home, and laughed over her wedding-gear going to the bottom of Lerwick harbour in a storm!

No lives being lost, the hopeful young bride could make merry over the loss of finery, and could gaily describe the woebegone appearance of her bandboxes when the vessel was "floated" again, and they were restored to their owner.

Almost a quarter of a century had passed since her marriage till my earliest recollections of her, and it had been an eventful period to her. But to return to personal reminiscences.

We followed our mother to the bureau, and watched her open one of the larger drawers. From thence she took a Bible,—not new, it had been lying with a pile of worn frocks and toys—and going back to her place by the table, she wrote my name in it and gave me the book without a word.

It lies before me now. There is a name before mine, written by the same mother's hand; but it is the same name in part, and had been that of a sister dead and gone.

I think that same evening I was nestling in sister Nye's arms, and she told me that the girl-companion of her childhood, two years her junior, the cleverest, the loveliest of our sisterhood of seven, had died the year before I was born, and her name had been bestowed upon me.

And Nye said, "That chapter mamma bade you read was one of the first Jessie's favourites, and you must take care of her Bible, and be a guid bairn."

It cannot have been many weeks later when I next recall our mother's room.

She was lying on the bed, its curtains drawn a little aside, and Nye bending tenderly over the pillow. The light was dim in the apartment, and folk spoke in whispers. Our father was standing by the mantelpiece, his head leaning on his hand.

Mam Willa (the old nurse whom we regarded with profound awe at all times) was sitting on a low seat by the fire muttering "guid wirds." The writing-table was shoved against the wall, and where it had been was set the family cradle, a ponderous wooden cot which swung solemnly like the pendulum of some ancient clock counting the days of the pilgrimage of a race.

We were looking into the cradle at a tiny atom of humanity, and wondering where Mam Willa had found the very thing we wanted—a baby brother!

There was a new smile on our mother's face, a new hope in her eyes, as she kissed us and bade us welcome "*him.*"

Just a year before, her first-born, the pride and darling of the home, had died in a far land; and to the new baby (our Benjamin) was given the lost one's name.

It was the father, not the mother, who gave the names of dead children to new comers. *She* always said that those who were gone were still part of her family-band, and she could not appropriate their names in that way. So those of us who had been so named seldom heard ourselves called by our baptismal designation, and our father was chief of those who gave us pet names instead.

"Benjamin" and myself have our names to thank for our coming in for a double portion of the home-spoiling.

After that period my memory becomes more clear, and our mother's room remains the distinct centre of the home-life.

Though our mother was an invalid more or less, and spent the greater part of her time in that apartment, it was upon the whole a joyous place. Her sunny nature, conquering pain and sorrow, diffused itself around, and attracted to itself the brighter portions of life without.

There was no hushing of childish voices, no stilling of young footfalls when the bairns raced upstairs "to tell mamma;" though doubtless their noisy approaches and startling announcements must have frequently tried her delicate nerves very much. It is to be hoped they did not think of that in their impatience to have her participate in everything which interested them.

Each morning the members of the family were wont to drop into her room "promiscuous-like" and talk over plans for the day, hopes for the morrow, events of the past. Her sympathies were always ready and warm, so that "telling mamma" was a necessity of their lives, whether she approved of what they had to tell, or the reverse. Her faith was of the most unquestioning kind,—childlike in simplicity, feminine in its trustfulness, masculine in its strength. She would say, when some great difficulty had to be faced, or some apprehended trouble to be overcome, "We will do the best we can, and when all else fails just trust in Providence!" and that became a family saying, for though her children laughed over the impulsively stated, and not very clear expression of her sentiments, they knew she meant they should do their best, believing that where honest endeavour fails, God takes up the burden.

On Sunday evenings the family, including servants, and usually one or two humble neighbours, were collected in our mother's room for what one called her "preachment." Her reading and expounding of Scripture were like the telling of a dramatic tale, and the vivid pictures she drew of Jewish life, character, and romance held all entranced.

All were allowed to ask questions, and the reader was frequently startled by the remarkable propositions advanced by such persons as "Cauds," the farm-man.

"Benjamin," being irrepressible at all times, and

possessed of an inquiring mind, was usually the one to set the example of "putting a poser."

On one occasion, when all were breathlessly listening to a graphic description of the overthrow of the cities of the plain and the fate of Lot's wife, there came suddenly from the bolster of her bed, where the small boy was perched like a very wide-awake imp, the question, "Is the pillar of salt there now?"

When told "no" he persisted, "Who took it away?" and I am afraid he was not satisfied when the preacher frankly admitted she knew no more of the story than Scripture told. "Cauds" ventured to suggest that it had been broken up for culinary purposes, and I think some of the youthful congregation accepted that theory, although our mother gravely explained that the salt in those regions is not the salt of domestic use.

The instinct of our mother's bright elastic nature was to cast from it all depressing influences. She loved to look at the hopeful side of everything.

Some such feelings may have prompted her, after additions had been made to the house—to remove herself and her belongings into another room than the one where she had suffered much. But she never seemed so domesticated (as one may term it) in the other room, and frequently removed back to the old apartment until its memories became too much for her weakened powers to endure.

Thus it happened that our mother's room was used by others, and there was born her first grandson.

There too, on our father's birthday, our mother gave

welcome to their first granddaughter who bore their joint names. They had not named any son or daughter after themselves, and it pleased them well that their "Oy" (granddaughter) should be so named.

Mam Willa and the family cradle reappeared, and there was peace and gladness in our mother's heart for a few brief years. She had lived to see seven of her children grown up,—some married, all "doing for themselves," yet ever needing the mother's love, and ever coming when circumstances would allow, to pour into her sympathetic hearing their joys and cares. Four were "at Home," and she had learned to speak composedly of them as waiting her coming.

She said (for health was then failing fast, and she did not expect to live many years more) that she had only one bit of work left to do.

This was the writing of her eldest son's "Life," and this she was given time to do. I observed that while engaged upon this work she spent most of her time in the old room, and during those days her thoughts were much in the Past. She loved to talk *then* of family matters, which hitherto she had rather avoided as being too sad to dwell upon.

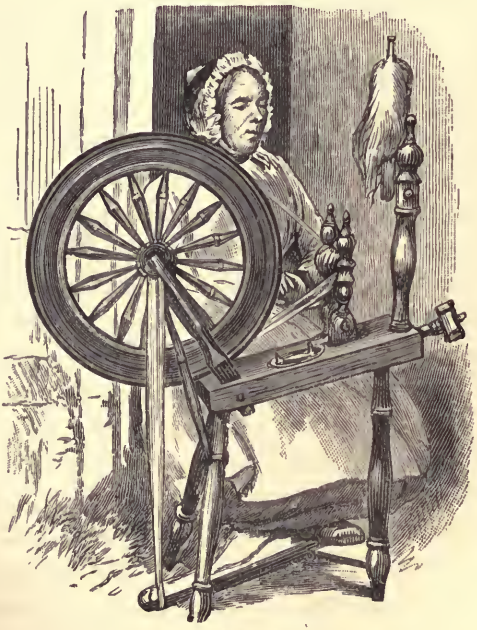
When the MS. was nearly completed the storm burst once more. The little "Oy" was quickly called Home, and the grandmother's heart was broken.

I went "to tell mamma," but being cautioned on the stair to try and control myself, as she was very ill, and feeling the child's death acutely, I for the first time realised that our positions were reversed in part.

So I was quiet, and going into our mother's room—where my one wee lassie had come to me five years before—I just said, "My bairn has gone to your bairns, mamma."

Poor mother! I think I felt more sorry for her than for myself as she wailed, "O bairn! bairn!"

Before many months she had followed the child, and our mother's room for ever lost that which had made it the dearest, happiest place on earth.



"MINNIE MERRAN."

# *OUR PETS.*

## CHAPTER I.

We were always taught, as already indicated, to regard the lower animals with tender respect and kindly sympathy—I had almost said with reverence. We were taught and we learned to love them, and to make friends and companions of them. The head of our house was passionately fond of them, and to watch and study their habits and idiosyncrasies was his delight, and became ours also. Many an animated discussion and argument we had about their faculties, and it was accepted as a general principle amongst us, and stoutly maintained, that their intellectual and moral powers differed from man's not essentially, but only in degree. We held that man had no right or title to claim a monopoly of reason which manifestly he did not possess; and so we repudiated the common practice of slumping, under the convenient term instinct, those faculties in the lower animals which are called intellect or reason in man. As no real difference could be shown or proved, we argued it was most inaccurate and illogical to make or assume such a difference by giving a dis-

tinctive name to one and the same thing. If they can be shown—as we held they could—to be endowed with reasoning powers, why not call them reasoning powers? Why say it is all instinct? Every trait, every incident which might be observed, bearing upon our favourite theory, was noted and commented upon. Examples of more than ordinary sagacity, reflection, or foresight, were eagerly rehearsed as affording unmistakable proofs of reason.

Shetland is a locality exceptionally favourable to the keeping of pets. There is ample scope. Neighbours impose no restrictions on the ground of nuisance, for they are almost always the reverse of near neighbours. Pets, especially of the feathered tribe—of which there is a vast variety in the islands—are obtainable generally at no cost whatever. Provisions in abundance are for the most part easily procured, and cheap withal, as one has only to call in the aid of rod or fishing-line or fowling-piece to stock the pets' larder on the shortest notice. The winter climate is remarkably mild; and lastly, there is a plentiful supply of water, salt and fresh. Add to these natural advantages of the locality that in our case, far from any limitation being put to the number and variety of our pets, we were not only permitted to keep as many as we chose, but were always encouraged in every possible way. The small enclosures about our house, the paddocks, and the garden were always at our command. Corners of the outhouses were sometimes allowed to be appropriated, and any quantity of stones and turf was at hand and

available. We did the building and tendance ourselves, and many a comfortable little dormitory we built for our pets. The thing most difficult to procure was wood; for no timber grows in the islands, and in the days I am speaking of, when I was a boy and our pocket-money scanty in the extreme, we were often put to our shifts for wood, which was very expensive. But we were always on the look-out for pieces of drift-wood, and not unfrequently were fortunate enough to pick up after a gale in one or other of the numerous little creeks—vernacularly *gyos*—around the coast, a plank or piece of broken spar washed off the deck of some passing vessel, and that was always regarded as a great prize. Many a time did we scramble down steep and slippery precipices of one or two hundred feet to secure such a prize, and never did we pass the *gyos* without a look for something of the kind. If our eye fell on the smallest scrap of wood a few feet long, and no thicker than a man's arm, tossing about in the broken water, down we clambered, with a few yards of fishing-line always carried on the chance of such opportunities. A stone was tied to the end of this line, and standing on some slippery rock with the sea surging around us, cast after cast was made over the miserable, bruised, and splintered, perhaps worm-eaten waif, till it was brought within reach of our hands, and secured.

I well remember two of us making a grand find in this way. It was a fine fresh spar, which after much dexterous manœuvring, we landed safely in the *gyo*.

The next thing was to get it up the precipice of two hundred feet. The plan we adopted was this. We doubled the line for strength, and tied it round one end of the spar. My companion—a servant boy about my own age—climbed up with the slack of the line as far as it would reach. Having secured a good footing, he hauled up the spar till it reached his hand, and then held it firm and steadied it, while I made my way up to its lower end, which having supported in some convenient niche or projection of rock, Magnie proceeded upwards to another vantage point, and hauled up as before. And so we crept upwards bit by bit. When not far from the top, a sudden exclamation of warning from Magnie made me glance quickly upwards. Right above me I saw the spar slipping through the loop. I had barely time to swerve a little to one side when down went our prize with a crash amongst the rocks far below. It was an exceedingly narrow escape, for if it had struck me—and it passed me within a few inches—I must have been carried down with it to certain destruction. I was a boy then and never thought of that, but only felt disappointed at so much labour being lost. Nothing daunted, we followed the spar; and our second essay was more successful. That spar was converted into couples for the roof of a splendid house for several of our pets. This is how, often at the risk of our lives, we were wont to get wood. In lieu of slates, we always used turf, which we thatched with straw.

In giving a short account of our principal pets,

domestic and domesticated, I should begin with by far the noblest of all the lower animals, and discourse of our dogs. But as space would fail me if I should attempt to enter upon so wide a field, I shall merely say that there were generally two or three dogs of different breeds in the house—Newfoundland, Retriever, Scotch Terrier, or Collie, as might happen. I have always given the preference to the last-named variety, perhaps because, at a very early age, I became the proud master of one. He was the constant companion and friend of my youthful years, the most faithful, affectionate, and intelligent of his species I have ever known. With the utmost ease I taught him every useful and ornamental accomplishment. He understood and obeyed my slightest wish or command. As a sporting dog, he was invaluable—while he lived and retained his vigour, I never needed another—pointing, hunting otters, coursing rabbits, retrieving on land or water, according to the exigencies of the occasion. Anything and everything of the sort he took to with a promptness and accuracy of appreciation that never failed. His sagacity saved my life once when in utmost peril. Dear old "Slop!" little wonder his memory is green, associated as it is with my happy long ago. We never chained our canine pets, that being regarded as a barbarous and cruel practice.

We always had an unlimited number of cats amongst our pets, each member of the family—by no means a small one—being the master or mistress, as the case might be, of at least one. I could say many things

about cats, and plead in their behalf many powerful arguments for more generous and kindly treatment than they often receive, but I forbear. The generic term always applied to cats in our circle was Mirza, which had originated in an observation of one of our family, that, like the hero of Addison's inimitable "Vision," they seemed to be continually falling into "a profound contemplation on the vanities of human—or shall we say feline?—life." From that day forward, cats were always spoken of as Mirzas.

Similarly the generic term of dogs was "Rinnins," "on the run" being a very marked characteristic of the species. The chief of our cats was always "Balaam," and "Slop" and "Pirate" were perpetuated and descended from dog to dog, as Pharaoh and Cæsar were borne by the rulers of Egypt and Rome.

Once we had an otter amongst our pets; a funny, active, energetic little fellow he was. The dogs and he were excellent friends, and it was exceedingly interesting and entertaining to watch them at their sham battles-royal, which took place almost every day. Worrying at each other's throat, locked in each other's embrace, and with no small pretence of seriousness, as evidenced by the fierce din and terrible exhibition of teeth, they rolled over and over on the lawn, till one of the combatants would lose his temper, and perhaps snap rather viciously; then they would slowly and decorously separate, apparently thinking they had had enough of the rough sport, and it would be prudent not to prolong it. Once our pet otter gave us a great

fright. All the members of the household had retired to their rooms and were preparing for bed, when we were startled by a series of the wildest shrieks proceeding from the servant-girls' bedroom. In the full persuasion of finding the house on fire at the very least, we all rushed frantically to the scene of alarm, where we soon discovered the cause of the hubbub. One of the girls, never very remarkable for strength of nerve, had jumped into bed, gathered the blankets about her, and shoved down her feet, which came into violent and unexpected contact with *something* which clearly had no legitimate business there. That something was our pet otter. His comfortable slumbers thus unceremoniously disturbed, he had, naturally enough, seized with what was very much the reverse of gentleness, the big toe of the offending foot, and certainly left his mark there. It was not to be wondered at that the poor girl got a great fright, although I am happy to say it was not followed by such disastrous results as she anticipated when she protested hysterically that she would never get over it —never! The intruder was of course relegated to his own proper dormitory amid peals of unrestrainable laughter.

Twice we had a tame seal. What fellows they were to eat! A few hundred sillacks—young of the saithe or coal-fish—barely served them for a meal; but after a short time, when they became quite tame, they fished for themselves in the sea, always returning to their comfortable quarters in one of the outhouses.

The fate of one was tragic. On one of his hunting expeditions he had apparently roamed beyond the limits of his usual haunts, and lost his way in a snowstorm. Landing several miles from home, he was making for the nearest fisherman's hut, when he was met by some thoughtless lads, who knocked him on the head, converted his blubber into oil, and his skin into *rivlins*—the vernacular for a kind of moccasin made of untanned hide. When taxed with the murder of our pet, the rascals pretended they thought it was a wild selkie driven on shore by stress of weather. The other seal, after thriving splendidly, and growing fast and fat, suddenly refused food, got dull, would scarcely stay a minute in the sea, which had formerly been his delight, and after pining away for three weeks, died. A post-mortem examination discovered a considerable quantity of gravel in his stomach, which there could be no doubt had been the cause of death. He had swallowed it with his food, which had been thoughtlessly thrown on the floor of his house. We were very sorry when we lost our pet seals, for they were intelligent, gentle, and affectionate creatures, and albeit their movements on land were ungainly, it was delightful and refreshing to see them disporting themselves in their native element. And their eyes! such eyes! they were simply the loveliest I ever saw in any creature—large, dark, liquid, and lustrous, with a wistful, pleading, melancholy expression that went far to justify the local legend which represents them as a certain class of fallen spirits in metempsychosis, enduring a mitigated punishment

for their sins. The seal has a way of looking right into your eyes, as though asking for sympathy and kind treatment. It makes one feel pitiful towards them, and I wonder exceedingly how the sailors who prosecute "seal-fishing" in the polar regions can have the heart to knock them on the head with a bludgeon.

Ornithology was our father's favourite branch of Natural History. He made numerous additions to the list of British birds, notably the Snowy owl and the Glaucus, Iceland and Ivory gulls; and our pride in the name he had in this department made for himself in the scientific world inspired us with the "noble ambition" to seek in birds and bird-life something more than mere *pets*—to solve some interesting problems in regard to changes of plumage in their progress to maturity, to watch and closely study their habits, to educate their intelligence, and so forth.

Naturally therefore our principal pets were of the feathered tribe, and I pass on to say something of them. I should have mentioned that we gave names to all our pets, beasts and birds. Our patriotism, and consequent partiality for everything Norsk, led us to prefer those of Scandinavian mythology or history—Odin, Thor, Baldur, Sigmund, Harald, Rolf, Rognvald, Ingeborg, Dagmar, and the like. The great Wizard's charming romance made Pirate and Norna and Minna and Brenda great favourites; other names were suggested by some peculiarity of appearance or trait of character in our pets, or some circumstance connected with their capture or early life. Thus two ducks that always selected for

their nest a spot amongst some long grass on the bank of a little stream, and year after year, in the most friendly and sisterly manner, incubated side by side, were dubbed Bessie Bell and Mary Gray. A splendid game-cock, of impetuous valour and unconquerable prowess, received the distinguished name of Cœur-de-lion. A burly pigeon, remarkable for the inconstancy of his attachments and the number of his wives, was Henry VIII., and his mates were of course namesakes of that monarch's consorts. A gull recovering from the gun-shot wound which made him a prisoner, but deprived him of an eye and a pinion, was Nelson. A raven—simply, I suppose, because he was black—was Othello. And so on. Thus we were never at a loss for names. The individuality which close observation soon discovers in animals even of the same species is truly wonderful; the variety is just as great as in the *genus homo.* It was a common practice with us, therefore, to change the original name into a characteristic one.

Of fowls, ducks, geese, pigeons, we had a goodly number; but in making pets of these, there was one considerable drawback. It was against the rules to transfer any of them to the larder, despite the old cook's loud, and I am afraid sometimes contemptuous, protestations against the sentimentality which refused to permit Bessie Bell or Mary Gray, or Cœur-de-lion, or the Templar, or Henry VIII., or any of their families, to be converted into roast duck, even when the peas were temptingly green, or boiled fowl or pigeon-pie, when

not a scrap of fresh butcher-meat was to be had for love or money—a thing by no means of unfrequent occurrence in our island in those days. How could one sign the death-warrant of the affectionate and confiding creatures that flew to you whenever you appeared for the crust of bread or oatmeal cake with which your pocket was always well supplied, and whose characters and dispositions you had been making an interesting study? To dine or sup off one of our pets was not to be thought of. *We* could not have done it; and happily our father would listen to no appeals in that direction. He peremptorily refused his permission, and no one dared to attempt surreptitious slaughter. The only thing allowed was an occasional exchange with a neighbour, and even that was only in the case of young birds—chickens, ducks, or geese.

Multiplying of the stock to any great extent was certainly not encouraged, rather discouraged indeed; but the adults were allowed to live and roam about in peace, and to die of old age or by accident as chance might befall.

It will be understood from this that our poultry-yard birds—which, though I give them that name, were never confined to any such limits as a poultry-yard—were the reverse of profitable. Eggs we had certainly in tolerable abundance; but that was about all. Owing to the predatory practices of raven and hooded crow, the only kind of fowls we were able to keep was the game variety, and these were always safe. If chanticleer was at hand, these rapacious and wily robbers

did not dare to attack one of his wives or progeny. They perfectly understood the clear note of defiance which challenged them to the combat. Even the hens in the absence of their natural protector never failed to give battle when attacked. Once a venturesome raven pounced upon some chickens, but was fiercely met by the mother-bird. Her lord and master, the redoubted Cœur-de-lion, not far off, hearing the scuffle, flew to the rescue, and instantly closed in mortal combat with the audacious assailant. The battle was furious, but brief and decisive. The raven was hurled senseless, with outspread wings, into a ditch close by; and the cock's "shrill clarion" proclaimed him victor. Our father, who witnessed this rencontre, ran out; and not till within a few feet of the raven, did the latter gather himself together and make off.

## CHAPTER II.

I MUST now give some account of those pets which were our especial charge and delight, namely, the wild birds which we tamed, and of which we had always a considerable number. In what follows, I merely make a selection of the most interesting of our pets of this description.

The starling, which is one of the commonest of Shetland birds, makes a charming pet. He is easily domesticated, and becomes exceedingly familiar—a brisk, bustling, pert little fellow, with really a great amount of fun in his composition. One starling we

had for many years. When not quite able to fly properly, he had been pounced upon by one of the cats; but was rescued, and, soon recovering from the fright, grew to be a beauty and a great favourite with us all. We never attempted to teach him to speak; but his natural powers of mimicry were extraordinary. He imitated the notes or cries of other birds to perfection. When the weather was fine, his cage was slung up out of doors, where he enjoyed immensely the sunshine and fresh air, and had ample opportunities for exercising his peculiar gift. The whistle of the curlew and ringed plover—the plaintive song of the long-tailed duck—the croak of the raven—the caw of the hooded crow—the wild scream of the seamew—the sharp chatter of the tern, he perfectly reproduced. We had a mountain linnet at the same time, an exceedingly sweet songster. As soon as the latter commenced his morning song, Jack the starling began to fidget about and ruffle up his feathers, and work himself into a state of anger and indignation most amusing to witness. Presently he seemed to come to the conclusion that the linnet was either chaffing or challenging him; and as such a thing was not to be endured by such a very superior bird as himself, he resolved not to be outdone; so, settling himself on his perch, and drawing in his head between his shoulders till he appeared to have no neck at all, he poured forth a song so exactly after the linnet fashion and on the linnet key, that the imitation was pronounced as good as the original. But the exertion seemed to be great and fatiguing, and was seldom

sustained for any length of time, and always concluded with a few harsh, loud, and utterly unmusical bars of his own proper pipe, shrieked out in an angry and impatient manner intensely ludicrous, and just as if he meant to say: "There! Whatever you may think, that's as good as yours any day." After a few minutes' rest and a little refreshment of water, he would begin again, and repeat the same performance.

Several times we had amongst our pets a Snowy owl. This magnificent and rare bird does not seem now to breed in Shetland, though there is reason to believe it did at one time. Our pets of this species were, therefore, adults which had been slightly wounded, or caught when asleep at the side of a stone on the hill-top. They are certainly the most beautiful and handsome of their kind; but they do not make good pets. They are too powerful and naturally fierce to make it safe to allow them much liberty; and possibly owing to their not having been tamed from the nest, they never got reconciled to confinement and restraint. They always recognised the person who usually fed them, and showed, in a certain uncouth way, that they were not ungrateful for the rabbits, mice, starlings, buntings, and the like fare with which they were liberally supplied; but on the whole, we found them sulky, fierce, and untractable; and they showed very little intelligence, justifying the phrase which describes a man who is dull of apprehension to be as "stupid as an owl."

We had a splendid Peregrine falcon once, and *he* had no lack of the brightest intelligence. He was my

especial property, and although always gentle and fond of being noticed and caressed by any one, towards me he showed the most devoted attachment and affection. He flew after me whenever I allowed him, and was never so happy as when perched upon my arm or shoulder. I was wont to take him to a fine warren, and he soon got quite adroit at catching rabbits.

Often we had Merlins, Kestrels, and Sparrow-hawks brought us from their nests in some wild and lofty cliff by a noted and obliging cragsman, who was always able and willing to supply us with almost any kind of young birds we might wish for pets. All the hawks we found easy to tame, docile, and intelligent; and they were consequently great favourites. But of all our pets amongst the land birds, I select for special notice the Hooded crow. He is not a beautiful bird, certainly; but he makes up for his not handsome appearance by his exceeding cleverness. Birds as a general rule do not seem to be endowed with a great sense of humour; but the Hooded crow is an exception. He is brimful of fun of a certain description, delighting in nothing so much as practical jokes; and withal he is good-tempered, merry, and cheerful. The sly cock of his head and twinkle of his keen little eye, it is impossible to misinterpret; he is continually meditating a trick or mischief of some sort. No bird is easier to tame; and he speedily becomes not only confident, but pertly familiar and impudent. We had one in particular for many years. We called him Crabbie, because of his sidelong mode of progression when not

on wing. His liberty was seldom restricted, unless he had been guilty of some prank more than usually audacious, and then his punishment would be a day or two's confinement, which he greatly hated; but he soon managed to coax us into giving him his freedom, and manifested the utmost gratitude to his liberator. His moral sense was at least as obtuse as a cat's. He delighted in stealing, simply as it seemed for its own sake, not because he could make any use of his plunder. Spoons, needles, wires, pirns of thread, balls of worsted, little one's shoes and socks, anything and everything that was portable to which he could get access, he would carry off, and carefully hide, covering them over with bits of turf, and then wiping his bill in the most self-satisfied manner hop away as though he had performed a highly meritorious action. Alas for the half-knitted stocking which might be left on a chair or table if Crabbie was about! The wires would quickly be pulled out and removed, and the stocking torn to tatters. I caught him one day—and an intensely droll figure he cut—hopping out of doors with a pipe in his bill. On another occasion he made off with a piece of tobacco. We never could make out whether he had any intention of himself trying the soothing effects of the weed. He had, or affected to have, a great dislike to bare feet, as the little boys who often came to the house with baskets of sillacks or with messages, had but too good reason to know. On the whole, he was on terms of very good friendship with the dogs and cats; but it always afforded him exquisite

delight to tease them, particularly to pinch the point of an outstretched tail, if the owner thereof happened to be asleep; and a pinch of his sharp and powerful bill, whatever pleasure it might afford him to inflict, was no joke to his victim.

Once an old woman was bringing a message to the house. Just as she was crossing a stile, Crabbie's quick eye fell on the spotless cap which adorned the old body's head. It was an opportunity too tempting to be resisted. Down he swooped, neatly plucked off her head-dress, and with a triumphant "Cra, Cra," flew away with it. Not being aware there was any such "uncanny brute" about the house, her consternation may be imagined; and when she appeared at the back door bereft of her white muslin mutch, and told, in tones of horrified agitation, how she had been despoiled of it by a "craw," she met with much sympathy from the domestics, who hated Crabbie with a most perfect hatred. And little wonder they hated him, for he teased and tormented them unmercifully, and by his never-ending tricks often imposed upon them a great amount of additional work. For instance, clothes on the bleaching green he seemed to regard as spread out for the special purpose of affording him an opportunity of showing how completely he could soil them. At anyrate, what he did whenever he got the chance, was to march and hop all over them in the most systematic manner, with the dirtiest effect.

What I am about to relate will appear to many incredible; but having frequently witnessed it, I can

vouch for its accuracy in every particular. Our old cook was a most expert dresser of the fine Shetland shawls so well known and so much prized. It is quite an accomplishment to be able to dress these delicate fabrics, and none but a Shetlander can do it properly. The shawl, having been washed and slightly starched, is stretched over the bleaching green, a few inches from the ground, with a multitude of wooden pegs like pencils, and allowed to dry in the sun. Crabbie would sit on some wall at a little distance, intently watching the proceedings of the old cook, who particularly detested him, and with whom he had a standing feud. Then he would fly off, and presently return with the very filthiest and wettest clod he could find, and of set purpose drop it upon the outstretched shawl, thereby rousing the righteous indignation of poor Meggy, who gave expression to her wrathful and outraged feelings in language much more forcible than choice; all which did not in the least affect Crabbie or disturb his equanimity. In these ways, however, he got to be such a nuisance that it became necessary on bleaching days, or when a shawl was being dressed, to make sure he was not at large, else the bleaching or dressing was certain to prove labour lost. But then he soon got so exceedingly cunning and adroit in avoiding capture, that it was often impossible to secure and confine him. At last, as we could fall upon no plan of curing him of his thievish and mischievous propensities, we were obliged, most reluctantly, to part with our poor Crabbie, who was sent to a friend in the south.

Sometimes we had Ravens amongst our feathered pets, once a piebald of this species from the Faröe Islands, where that variety is not uncommon. The Raven, like his congener the Hooded crow, is by nature a thief. Indeed, thievish proclivities may be said to be a conspicuous characteristic of the whole genus, as the Magpie, Jay, Rook, Jackdaw. No other class of birds, or beasts either, with which I am acquainted shows the same complete obliquity of moral sense. They steal not merely to satisfy the cravings of hunger—that one can understand and even condone —but apparently for the pleasure of the thing. It is clear they can make no use of needles and pins, knives and forks, brushes and combs, rings and other trinkets; but just you let them have the chance, and everything of this sort they will carry off and hide carefully, as a dog hides a bone. It is not with them a case of stealing in order to live, but living in order to steal; and I have no doubt their community always holds in highest esteem, and raises to the highest rank in their republic, him that is the most adroit and successful thief.

The Raven is as easily tamed as the Hooded crow; but he does not make so interesting and amusing a pet, being rather of a sulky and solitary disposition. In his wild state, he is excessively suspicious and wary, and he needs to be, for no mercy is ever shown him. He is a terrible robber of the poultry-yard, destroys great numbers of young lambs, and will never hesitate, if he gets the chance, to attack a weak or sickly pony.

The poor ponies, even in the most inclement weather, never know the luxury of a sheltering roof, and during the long winter seldom get any food but the scanty pickings of a barren common, varied with an occasional breakfast of seaweed. Consequently, they become very lean and weak in spring; and after lying down on the cold, damp ground, which they never do in winter, they often get so stiff as to be unable to rise without assistance. They are then said to be "in lifting." This is the cruel Raven's opportunity. In the cold gray dawn of the morning, he spies his victim making unavailing efforts to rise, swoops down upon him, and with a fierce dab of his powerful bill destroys one eye; a second thrust, and the pony is blinded; and in a few hours his carcass affords a rich repast to his murderer and a score of his kind. No wonder, then, that this "bird of ill omen" is persecuted and slaughtered without mercy, and that sometimes a price is set upon his head. But in spite of gun and poison, the wary and sagacious Ravens are still all too numerous. They build their nests in the loftiest and most inaccessible precipices, which generally defy the most expert and daring cragsmen to scale, and it is therefore not always easy to get a young Raven for a pet; and the universal detestation in which they are held perhaps helps to make them be regarded as not particularly desirable ones.

## CHAPTER III.

AMONGST our feathered pets, we always had a number of sea-birds; indeed, the larger proportion of them were of this class. The beautiful and graceful Herring-gull or Seamew is the commonest of the gulls in Shetland, and does not migrate to other climes after the breeding season, as do so many of his congeners, the Lesser black-backed gull, the Kittiwake, the Great skua, and the Arctic skua. One of this species we had for many years. No restraint was put upon her movements. She came and went at her pleasure, but always put in an appearance about dinner-time, when she was sure to get a meal of boiled fish or something else which seemed equally palatable; for she was not in the least particular, porridge or potatoes, or butter-milk curd, being apparently as much relished as newly caught sillacks. When the breeding season commenced, she always got a mate, and brought him with her to the house—to show, as I suppose, what a handsome one she had secured. The important duties of incubation on a high cliff not far distant having fairly commenced, and the cares of a rising family demanding her assiduous supervision, her visits for some weeks would be infrequent and brief. In due time, she would appear on the lawn, accompanied by her lord and master and two or three well-grown *scories* (Shetlandic for young gulls). It was a sight to see her in the full glory of her summer plumage—lovely snow-white breast, bluish-

gray back, and black-tipped wings—her head proudly erect, and every movement of her elegant form the perfection of tender grace and stately dignity, marching backwards and forwards, as though asking for approval, and pleased with the admiration she seemed conscious of inspiring. This bird was quite an institution about the house for I think at least five-and-twenty years. She is associated with my very earliest memories; and for years after I no longer resided in the old home, but annually visited it, it was no small delight to me to find my dear old friend healthy, hearty, and beautiful as ever.

Another of our pets was a Lesser black-backed gull; but she kept closely to the garden, which she manifestly regarded as her especial domain, if one might judge from the violent indignation she exhibited, and the furious rage into which she wrought herself if any other bird, or a dog or cat, were introduced or showed face within the precincts of her half-acre. Some injury to her wing in her *scorie* days rendered her unable to fly; but indeed, even if she could have used her wings, it would have been a great risk to allow it; for this species, as I have mentioned, unlike the Herring-gull, regularly migrates southwards on the approach of winter; and probably the instinct to move off with her kind would have proved too strong for her local attachments, and we should have lost her. She died a natural death, at the advanced age of twenty-four.

Another of our pets was a Greater black-backed gull, an immense burly fellow, a sort of alderman

amongst the gulls, whose habits and practices were very similar to those of the Herring-gull. He came and went as she did, and like her, put in a daily appearance at the early dinner-hour of three o'clock, with a punctuality which was a standing reproof to some members of the family—myself, I fear, more than any one else.

The Glaucus gull is a magnificent bird, nearly as large as the last named, but handsomer, and more active in his habits and movements. He does not breed in Shetland, but is a pretty regular winter visitor. We were very anxious to obtain a Glaucus for a pet; but the difficulty was to procure one without injuring him. Long and deep were the discussions we held, and many were the schemes proposed. At last we succeeded in capturing one. Like most of the larger species of gulls, the Glaucus is very partial to carrion of every description. A pony had tumbled over a precipice, and his carcass was washed up by the sea on a little beach hard by. We observed a fine young Glaucus at daybreak on several successive mornings making his breakfast off the poor pony's bones. Here was a chance not to be let slip. First we tried a number of nooses, but failed. Finally we captured him with a pretty large baited hook, across the shaft of which a piece of wire about three inches long was attached to prevent swallowing outright. The hook caught in the lower mandible. We nipped off the barb with a pincers, extracted the hook, and no manner of injury was done. He was an exceedingly

beautiful and handsome bird, but did not prove a very successful pet; for having experienced the sweets of liberty, he never became very familiar. We clipped his wings, and kept him in the garden, to the great disgust of our Lesser black-backed gull, who evidently regarded him as an interloper, and would fain have murdered, or at least extruded him, had he been able; but soon learning that he was no match for the Glaucus, he restricted his ill temper to sulking and complaining. We kept our Glaucus in captivity for some months; till at last, not having noticed that his pinions required shortening, he took advantage of what was, for him at least, a favourable storm of wind, to make his escape, and we never saw him more.

The Great skua or "Bonxie" is another of the gull tribe which we occasionally numbered among our pets. This bold and powerful bird, with his eminently robust frame and chocolate-coloured plumage, a king amongst the gulls, fierce and almost rapacious in his habits, is now rare in Shetland, where he appears about the end of April, leaving again in autumn, after the breeding season is over. A few pairs breed on the isolated island of Foula, a few on Rooness Hill, and a few on Hermaness, the most northern promontory of Unst. Their numbers, however, have latterly become thinned; the high market-price of their eggs, and the wanton, pitiless cupidity of rambling tourists, who thought no shame to shoot down the noble birds even in the middle of the breeding season, combining to all but exterminate the Great skua. It is to be hoped, now

that the Wild Bird Preservation Act is in force, they will multiply. To be allowed to procure a young skua was an immense favour and concession. We had one for several years; and a most interesting and intelligent pet he was. The only drawback was that he was rather inclined to tyrannise over all other birds about the premises which might come within his reach, always excepting our gamecock Cœur-de-lion. The two had more than once tried conclusions; but the skua received such thorough chastisement for his daring presumption, that he soon learned habitually to acknowledge the superiority of his conqueror. He had an excellent appetite, and was quite omnivorous, anything and everything eatable being gratefully received, from new-caught trout or herring and sheep's liver, to cold potatoes and porridge. But I am afraid he did not always confine himself strictly to the fare provided for him; for it was pretty well known amongst us that several of Bessie Bell and Mary Gray's newly hatched ducklings, which had disappeared mysteriously, had passed into his greedy maw; so we needed to be very careful not to allow him opportunities of exercising his rapacious propensities, which he was but too ready to take advantage of when he wanted a specially dainty dinner.

We had a very effective trap for catching mice. A little grease of any kind was dropped in the bottom of a bowl and sprinkled over with oatmeal. The bowl was turned on a plate, and supported on the lip by a penny. Mousie is the most simple and unsuspicious

of creatures, and in this respect strikingly contrasts with her eminently sagacious and cunning congener, the rat. In her efforts to get at the tempting fare provided for her, she moves the treacherous dome; the supporting penny slips, down comes the bowl, and she is a prisoner. I thought our skua would not be unwilling to try his digestive organs on a mouse; so one morning I took the plate and bowl with a captive mouse to the tub in which he was washing himself, and dropped it in the water. In a moment he seized and swallowed it alive. The poor little creature, evidently resenting such treatment, and kicking against such an unceremonious proceeding, made it highly uncomfortable for the skua's gullet; so mousie was quietly disgorged *still alive*. A pinch on the head speedily despatched her, and then she was swallowed without any further unpleasant consequences. Ever after that when I caught a mouse in the manner described, and sallied forth with the plate and bowl, "Bonxie," who perfectly understood what it meant, flew to me full of eager expectation. I raised the lip of the bowl the least thing, when, as neatly as possible he inserted his bill sideways, pulled out the little prisoner, killed, and bolted it. Ten or twelve mice were no more than a comfortable breakfast for him, and fare which evidently he enjoyed exceedingly.

Another of the gull tribe, closely allied to the last, which we frequently had amongst our pets, but were never able to keep alive for any length of time, was the Arctic or Richardson's skua. This elegant and active

little bird, about the size of an ordinary pigeon, is much more common than the Great skua. Like his big congener, he is seen in Shetland only during summer and autumn. On the wing, he is one of the swiftest and most graceful of the feathered tribe. Some birds, as is well known, have a practice of simulating distress, in order to allure from the neighbourhood of their nests any one who may be approaching dangerously near; but no bird with which I am acquainted can approach the Arctic skua in this artifice. His acting is simply perfect. As Dr. Saxby, in his admirable "Birds of Shetland," says: "There is not an ill that bird-flesh is heir to, which the shooi [the Arctic skua's Shetland name] cannot convince you he is afflicted with."

This bird has another peculiarity worth mentioning. He seems to disdain the laborious task of fishing for himself; but, from his proceedings, evidently regards all other birds of the gull tribe as existing solely for the purpose of catering for him. No sooner does he spy one carrying home, perchance, a supper to her hungry family, or contentedly and lazily hieing to some skerry with an evidently well-filled maw, than he gives chase, pestering the poor stupid gull unmercifully, and despite the latter's loud remonstrances, demanding of her to deliver up. Not relishing that all her labour should be lost, very possibly she bolts what she may be carrying, if she had not done so before, in the hope, no doubt, that with its disappearance the robber will desist. Vain hope. The little falcon skua is not to be put off in that way, and only becomes

more imperative and more fierce in his attacks. Nothing for it, therefore, but to give up or disgorge the object of contention; which she does at last with a very bad grace certainly, and with a loud scream of angry disgust. Before it has reached the sea, it is snapped up and carried off in triumph by this freebooter of the air. Owing to this singular habit of the Arctic skua, we had a theory that there was some weakness or peculiarity in his digestive organs, which rendered it necessary that his food should be partially digested, or at least lubricated with foreign saliva, before it was in a fit condition for his delicate stomach. I do not know if there is anything in the notion; but certain it is, we never saw him fishing or seeking any kind of food on his own account, like other respectable and industrious birds; and seldom ever saw him that he was not fiercely engaged in pressing and persecuting his neighbours in the manner and for the purpose described.. Moreover, the young birds of this species were our only pets that never throve well in captivity; but notwithstanding the utmost care and attention, always pined away after a few months and died.

The variation in the plumage of the adult Arctic skua, as is well known to ornithologists, is very remarkable and very perplexing. There are two distinct varieties, and only two. One is dark brown all over; the other is of a similar colour on the back, head, and neck, but the lower part of the breast and the belly are white. It is not accounted for by sex, as we proved by dissection, and as we knew perfectly

well from observing pairs, sometimes both of the all-over-dark-coloured variety, sometimes both of the white-bellied, sometimes one of each. There is also a marked difference in the colour of the young birds—one being dark chocolate-brown, and another a very light brown, and mottled almost exactly like a young hawk. There are two young birds in each nest; both may be of the dark or both of the light variety, or there may be one of each; while the parent birds are also of either colour, dark or white bellied indiscriminately. The strong presumption is, that the lighter-coloured young birds develop into the white-bellied adults, and not, as some suppose, that the variety is referable to age. One great object with us was to solve this problem; but from our pets of this species never surviving the first winter, and so never reaching the moulting stage, we failed to throw any light on so singular an anomaly. But this is ornithology, and I am afraid rather a digression.

I pass over many more of our feathered pets, and conclude with a notice of Toby, whose memory deserves something more than a passing reference. Toby was a magnificent Cormorant, taken when very young from his nest on the side of a *hellyer*—Shetlandic for a cave or cavern into which the sea flows. He was easily tamed; and became one of the most familiar, intelligent, affectionate, and interesting of our pets. We very soon came to learn the exceeding appropriateness of the saying, "voracious as a cormorant." What a splendid appetite, what a capacious maw our Toby

had! Fish he preferred certainly, and I should be afraid to state the number of sillacks or trout he could discuss at a meal. But so long as he got quantity he was not in the least particular about quality. He was omnivorous, and no mistake. Nothing eatable, nothing digestible, seemed to come amiss to him,—mice, young rabbits, small birds, porridge, potatoes, bread, seal and whale flesh, being just as gratefully received and devoured as the freshest of fish. One day his breakfast consisted of twelve mice, which exhausted the supply, or I am sure he would have consumed as many more, for he was not half satisfied. Another day five plump starlings, wings, feet, bills, and all, disappeared down his throat with manifest gusto. Eight or ten sparrows were nothing more than a tolerably comfortable meal for Toby. Once he attempted to swallow a live young kitten, and had half accomplised the feat when the poor little thing was rescued, evidently very much to Toby's disappointment and disgust.

Toby's favourite perch was the chimney top. When he saw any one coming to the house with a basket, or little boys with a string of small cod, down he swooped with an imperative demand for toll; and if his obvious wishes were not attended to, he made no scruple about helping himself without leave asked or granted, and the small boys at least were a deal too much afraid to offer any opposition. When Toby was nearly a year old, he was one day surveying the landscape from his elevated perch on the chimney. After considerable meditation, stretching out of his neck, and shaking his

wings, he seemed for the first time to realise that the sea, which was not far distant, was a place he had a legitimate right to know something about, and that possibly he might find something there worth seeking. Toby was not the sort of fellow to hesitate from any fear of the unexplored region he saw before him. He was always bold and prompt in action. To our consternation, he made a grand plunge into the air, and flew off direct to the sea. We all thought he had taken final leave of us, for he had never before been known to roam beyond a hundred yards from the house. It seemed hopeless to follow; yet follow we did down to the beach in the direction we had seen him take. Our boat was hauled down, and for several hours we rowed about the bay, thinking, if we could only fall in with him, he was so tame and confident, he would come to our familiar call. But our search was fruitless; and we were obliged to return home discouraged and sorrowful. What, then, was our surprise and joy to find our favourite sitting on his accustomed perch, as happy and comfortable as possible,—his outspread wings, quiet, self-satisfied air, and general appearance of content, proving to us, who knew his manners so well, that his cruise, although a short one, had certainly as a hunting, or rather fishing expedition, been highly successful. After that, Toby went daily to the sea and catered for himself; and we were very glad he did so, for it relieved our pets' larder very considerably. Toby was very fond of the kitchen fireside, and not unfrequently found his way into the dining-room in

search of the head of the house, for whom he always showed the utmost fondness and affection.

Poor Toby! his fate was melancholy and tragic. My faithful old dog was as partial to the kitchen fireside as Toby was. He had reached the venerable—for a dog very venerable—age of twenty. Very deaf, very blind, very rheumatic, and nearly toothless, he was nevertheless honoured and cherished, as he deserved to be, and no one interfered with his favourite nook by the ingle. He had not only himself been honest and trusty during all his long life, but always exacted the strictest integrity of conduct from all over whom he had any influence or control, and would permit no peculation if he could prevent it. One day—fatal day for poor Toby!—no one but the old dog was in the kitchen. There happened to be some oatmeal cakes toasting before the fire. The door was open, and Toby hobbled in. He was never, it must be confessed, troubled with any scruples of conscience. I don't think Nature had endowed him with a conscience at all, and so he is not to be blamed. He was hungry; the cakes looked inviting; and they were temptingly within reach. Given these conditions and circumstances, and only one thing was sure to happen. Toby proceeded to help himself. The wrath and indignation of the old dog were roused. A brief scuffle ensued. Some one ran to see what all the terrible din was about; and found poor Toby in the death-agony, with outspread wings and neck broken, the tell-tale cakes scattered upon the floor, and his slayer standing over him, and

looking very much ashamed and crestfallen, and as though he was exceedingly afraid his well-meant, honest zeal had for once carried him too far. I do not know whether the effort had been too much for his feeble strength, or whether the reproaches of conscience—*he* had a conscience, without doubt—proved more than he was able to bear; but the fact is he survived Toby only a few days; and they were buried tenderly and sorrowfully side by side in a little patch of ground consecrated as the cemetery of Our Pets.

"BALAAM THE BRAHMIN."

# *HOUSEKEEPING.*

## CHAPTER I.

Nye had returned to her remote home, a "city-and-boarding-school-finished-Miss," and revolutions in the domestic routine were inaugurated by her declaration that the girls must share with her the duties of housekeeper.

For many years Nye had carried the key-basket—awful insignia of office—and under the direction of an invalid mother had proved herself an excellent young housekeeper. Much honour had been paid to her in consequence, and I do not think she objected to being considered an important personage. But such honour was earned through much care, not to mention worry, and Nye thought the time had come when some of those for whom she had toiled ought to share her labours, and thereby earn housewifely fame for themselves and for her. Fame that has to be gained and retained by infinite anxiety and little repose is apt to become distasteful; and however willing Nye might be to cast the mantle of her housekeeping attainments

upon her sisters, no one of them was particularly anxious to appropriate the descending mantle.

Nye was much older than her sisters; Tribulation (or Tribby, as she was usually called) came next; Wildie was third; and Lalya last. These girls had received Christian names at their baptism, but those with which I introduce them were familiar in the family circle, and were more characteristic of the individuals than their real names.

I do not know how much discussion had taken place between Nye and her parents upon the advisability of laying such grave responsibility on the weak shoulders of the "growing girls." Our mother believed that their education in housekeeping should come bit by bit, but her ideas were frequently overruled by Nye. Our father usually allowed Nye to do as she saw fit, provided she did not interfere with *his* right to indulge any or all of his young ones. I believe he gave valuable advice, as well as hints, how to make housekeeping pleasant to learners in the art; but how far his wishes were followed I cannot tell. That the matter had been fully discussed, and the line of action firmly decided upon, was evident to both Tribby and Wildie when they were summoned to hear what the home authorities proposed; but Lalya had arrived at a conclusion of her own. That sagacious young woman had been prying about kitchens and store-closets since she toddled out of her cradle, and she would probably have been the most experienced hand of any; but when she put in her claim Nye snuffed it out by some

allusions to a person who could not spell a word of four syllables, and who was suspected of being a tool in the hands of old servants. Such a person was totally incapacitated from carrying a key-basket. Lalya dissolved in tears and withdrew her claim, and Nye having astutely squashed the ineligible aspirant, proceeded to inform Tribby and Wildie that the housekeeping, with all its cares, responsibilities, and honours, was to be divided between them.

"How divided?" asked Wildie, with a baseless hope surging in her breast. She knew that whenever joint performance was expected from Tribby and herself, all the disagreeables got shoved on to poor Tribulation's smaller though older shoulders.

A wistful smile flitted across Tribby's face, and she glanced at her dear tormentor as though she would say, "I would help you if I could."

Nye replied to Wildie's question. She said, "It will be an equal division. Tribby will take charge one week, you next—*entire charge, mind*—and I will take the third week. Of course it will happen that when we have visitors, or anything of that sort, I may be required for other things, and when that is the case one of you will take my turn."

The dismay on Wildie's face provoked a laugh from our mother—a laugh which she qualified by saying, "You will aye have *me* to come to." Then Nye added, "I will help you, of course, Wildie, if you get into difficulties; but really, you know, it is more than time that you gave your thoughts to something besides books

and ponies and Tom-boy nonsense: a girl of your age should see the wisdom of what I say."

"*Tribby* won't want much of your help," said our mother, in her pleasant and most motherly way; "she managed very well indeed while you were from home, and I know she has for long been taking a number of your minor duties, Nye."

"Oh, trifles!" said Nye, with a sniff.

Tribby might have mentioned a great many "trifles" which had cost her some tears and frequent headaches, but it was not Tribby's way to assert herself, so she said nothing; and after various details had been arranged and general directions issued, Nye handed the key-basket to Tribulation, who took it with a protesting jerk.

For twenty-four hours that impending key-basket cast a cloud upon Wildie's high spirits; but at the end of that time she determined to forget it until forced by fate and the home rulers to undertake its responsibilities. She would have been wiser had she prepared herself for the duties of her coming office by careful observation of the way in which Tribby performed those duties. But, alas! the present was always so full of fresh sweetness for Wildie that she never desired to burden it with the cares of to-morrow; consequently, she avoided even an allusion to the coming time. One day her pet brother roused her wrath considerably, by some ill-timed jest about the sort of dinner he was likely to get a week hence. But that, too, was turned aside and forgotten.

## CHAPTER II.

TRIBBY'S week rolled smoothly on. She had a natural talent for household management. The "trifles" which she had so unselfishly and silently executed during Nye's undivided monarchy had taught her a great part of the practical duties of her new position. Meals came on the table at the regularly-established hours. There was always plenty of home-baked bread forthcoming, and frequently a nice tea-cake made its appearance. Pies and puddings were unexceptionable. Roast and boiled were done to a turn. The supply of oil for the lamps never failed. If there had been a catch of fish in the neighbourhood, Tribby was certain to have secured some of the spoil. When the sportsmen of the family brought in rabbits and snipe, be sure they always made their appearance at table at the right moment and in the right condition.

If Tribulation's bread did *not* rise, or her pie-crust got burned, or the old, spoilt servants became aggravating, or the boys plundered her stores, no one knew. Once or twice, after she and Wildie had snugged into bed, Tribby's overcharged feelings found expression in dark forebodings. "She knew how it would end. Nye's city experience had taught her to dislike the drudgery of home-work, and Wildie's natural propensities were altogether antagonistic to the same. It would all fall upon her—Tribby. Not that she wished Nye to have less leisure—not that she desired to curb Wildie's roving instincts; oh, no! only, it was

just a little hard to look ahead, and see nothing for herself but a perpetual carrying of the key-basket."

The heartless being who shared Tribby's bed and confidence not infrequently preferred lulling her senses to sleep by castle-building of an unsubstantial description, to expressing sympathy with Tribby. When such was the case, Lalya's wide-open eyes would appear somewhere in the vicinity, and their owner would hazard some remark of a far-fetched, well-intentioned nature, which Tribby learned, in time, to receive with a good grace. Then Tribby smothered her cares and anxieties as best she could, and got through her week of housekeeping with credit.

On Sunday evening, just before saying good-night, Tribby handed the key-basket to Wildie with an air of self-satisfaction trying to that young lady. At the moment she was lost in a vision of the beautiful young Psalmist wandering among the hills of Judah, composing odes and sacred songs, and singing of bird and flower. The key-basket didn't somehow fit into the occasion as it ought to have done if its recipient had prepared her mind for it properly. Its shadow lay heavily upon her dreams that night.

On Monday morning behold her! a dreaming, mischievous lassie, passionately fond of poetry and ponies, looking back regretfully to her days of cricket and ship-sailing, now walking with slow and most reluctant feet along the passages until she reached the store-room. There were cupboards and boxes scattered over the house and devoted to special items, but the

store-room was the grand emporium of the establishment. To some girls that apartment would have been a perfect paradise. To Wildie it was a purgatory, through whose tortures she had to work her way to the heaven of out-of-door delights in which her soul rejoiced. Was it so very unnatural, so extremely unfeminine, in her to shrink from the duties which sovereignty of that store-room involved? I think not; and I believe you will not be surprised at her absolute dislike to that which some of you consider "jolly fun" in ordinary circumstances.

For, my dear girls, I beg leave to state, that to be a housekeeper in Shetland, at the time and in the place of which I am writing, was to be under very extraordinary circumstances indeed. For one thing, it meant to be beyond the reach of "butcher, baker, candlestick-maker," though, alas! "gentleman, ploughboy, thief," were all within easy range—the two former ravenously demanding to be fed, the latter always on the alert to defy the key-basket. Also it meant to be frequently at one's wits' end for the common necessaries of life.

Somewhat depressed in spirits with what lay before her, Wildie entered her hall of state. It was not a closet by any means, but a room. On the left stood a row of large barrels containing meal, rice, &c. On the right, another row of casks held salted and smoked beef, mutton, and fish. There were boxes of candles, hampers of biscuits, jars of butter, flasks of colza oil and paraffin. There was a curious foreign box, which stood out from the rows as if it felt itself to be an interloper.

It contained rye rusks, brought from Holland, and however much the barrels of American rice and Scotch oatmeal might look down upon those hard brown squares, the children of the house had unanimously voted them to be infinitely superior to pudding and porridge. The shelves over the casks were filled with jars, bottles, baskets, and tins. Some of these were labelled, but the greater number were so characteristic, and had been in their places so many years, that even the children who were too young to spell, knew by the shape or other distinctive marks what each contained.

On a dresser which filled up the space in front of the window stood scales, tins, knife and spoon, for weighing, measuring, and portioning out various "raw material."

Before Wildie had done more than sigh as she surveyed her new domain, a maid appeared from the adjacent kitchen bearing empty scolls (a scoll, you must know, is a Norwegian wooden bowl), and then began Miss Wildie's reign of terror.

## CHAPTER III.

THE young housekeeper filled Gonga's scolls, and followed her to the kitchen to share in the work of converting raw material into eatable viands.

The kitchen had no grate, only a wide chimney, with peat-fire on the hearth. A bar of iron, passing from one side to the other, supported a huge kettle containing hot water, and a large pot in which the porridge was soon simmering.

Scattered promiscuously among glowing peats were various saucepans, and on one side of the hearth stood the oven. It was a round flat-bottomed pot raised on feet, so that a quantity of fire could be stowed underneath it. The lid was also flat, and was covered with glowing peats. On the hearthstone a quantity of clear peat cinders was spread in a red-hot mass, over which was laid a gridiron of ponderous manufacture. In shape and size it rather resembled a harrow.

In Wildie's very juvenile days she had been guilty of roasting more than one of Tribby's dolls on "The Iron." She had heard and appreciated the story of St. Lawrence, and believed in martyrology—being young and ignorant. A recollection of those innocent, ill-fated dolls flashed across her mind as she stood beside Glawthin's chair, watching that kitchen autocrat as she deftly turned the brünies (small cakes) about in her hands. Glawthin held the scoll of meal in her lap, and her eyes and tongue and hands seemed everywhere. Smoke was detected proceeding from the oven, and in a moment Glawthin applied the tongs to its lid, and, having removed it, peered anxiously into the oven, while her fingers moved tenderly among the snowy rolls, like a hen turning its eggs.

Then she would give the porridge a vigorous stir. Then she would turn the brünies on the iron, and all the time her tongue was going somewhat in this fashion:

"Nanny, lass, du micht lay a pate or twa upa da fire."

"Hannah, when is du goin' to bring milk for da bairns' brakfast?"

"Noo, Miss Wildie, ye need na fash ony mair, I'se mak' a' richt."

"Kist! Hoosh! Ye born tieves!"

This last to sundry dogs and cats prowling around.

"Jannie, if du does na take ben da things a corn faster, I'se come and see if I canna mak' de."

"Na, Maister To; be a gude boy, and I'se mak' you a crül" (a thick, round cake).

"Sh! Sh!" (to hens, ducks, cormorants, and pigeons, strolling promiscuously out and in). "If da doctor wis in my place I'se warren he widna like you sae weel as he does, ye tieves! Tak dat!" and away flew a peat among the beasts, birds, and bodies. A perfect Babel of clamouring voices was of course the immediate result, a flapping of wings, a sprawling of legs, and a general exodus.

A grim smile spread over Glawthin's face, and she remarked to Wildie:

"Dey'll no trouble me for a while after yon."

Unfortunately Wildie's sympathies were altogether on the other side, and she was not slow to let it be known; so from that hour there was a feud between the young housekeeper and Glawthin.

You all know that when a servant, especially an old and privileged one, chooses to be cross, she can make every domestic wheel jar and creek as if the oil of good nature had never been applied to them. In the case of a young inexperienced housekeeper, whose success

very greatly depends upon the help she gets from the maids, an aggravating menial is about the most trying affliction possible.

Glawthin was an admirable cook, and could easily have converted many of Wildie's never-before-heard-of mixtures into palatable enough food, but she didn't; and the result was very much what Wildie's pet brother had anticipated, only he was good enough to make no remark when there appeared some ugly-coloured, sticky substance, which the inventor faintly named hash, or pudding, or omelet, whichever of those well-known dishes had chanced to be in her mind when the mess was being fabricated.

For a day or two our father heroically tasted every dish which his girl set before him; but on the third day Nye appeared in the store-room, and insisted upon directing the directress.

There had been much conversation, but and ben, about Wildie's erratic proceedings, and the authorities of both departments had prompted Nye to take so decided a step. Now the sole consolations attached to carrying the key-basket were the liberty Wildie had to exercise her inventive genius, and the knowledge of power. To resign these was to give up the only pleasures of her position; so that after that visit of Nye's the poor young housekeeper—such in care and work only—did the duties of her humbled position with even less alacrity than before.

It would be a weary task for me to attempt telling you of all the misadventures which took place during

that week, and many a week ensuing; for although Nye superintended well, Wildie did not execute in the same manner, and the scoldings which followed made her worse.

How shall I tell of stale bread set aside for puddings surreptitiously handed through the store-room window to Chance, a pony, with whom Wildie was on the most intimate terms? How shall I tell of lamps unlighted, because she had forgotten to order a fresh supply of oil? How shall I tell of sugar allowed to become syrup, of salt unaccountably flavoured with washing-soda, of toast tasting of soap? Alas! those things are for ever chronicled in the family records, and brought forward whenever Wildie—now anything but the high-spirited lassie who earned for herself that name—presumes to speak on any branch of housekeeping.

## CHAPTER IV.

WILDIE'S utter incapacity for the duties imposed upon her was clearly shown on one occasion when she had retired to a certain pantry to wash the cups, &c. Minute after minute slipped by, and from that retreat she did not issue, nor (most remarkable fact of any) was there heard the usual clatter of dishes in that vicinity.

Nye, having taken upon herself to overlook the greater part of Wildie's performances, was usually "on the prowl," and, greatly wondering what had become of her, softly opened the pantry door. Wildie was

standing in front of the table. The towel had dropped on the floor, the hot water had cooled around the unwashed saucers, and Wildie had a plate in her left hand. That plate was held upside down, and on the inverted surface lay a small piece of writing-paper, almost covered with verses, in various stages of poetic existence.

The young author had paused for a word to rhyme with "rove." Nothing more original than "love" would suggest itself, and Wildie was at that stage of feminine existence when a perfect indifference to, and scorn for everything pertaining to the tender passion is at its height; therefore that word could not be made to fit into her poem. Otherwise, she must have been highly gratified with her own performance, and confident of finding a suitable rhyme before long, for a bright light was on her face, and Nye could not find it in her heart to scold. She merely exclaimed, "Is that the way you wash up dishes?"

Pencil, paper, plate, dropped from Wildie's hands, and that poem remains an unfinished relic of days departed.

Matters reached a climax when Tribby, coming after Wildie, found every article in the store-room put in a different position. All the jars and bottles which Wildie considered "not pretty" had been set behind something which she had arranged in artistic, but highly impracticable order. The barrels had been shoved about so as to stand in the order of their sizes and with royal disregard to their contents.

That would be the style one week, and Tribby would bear it; but next time she took her "turn," lo! some new idea had possessed her younger sister, and all the casks, &c., &c., had got into another position.

"I really cannot stand this any longer, mamma!" exclaimed Tribulation, bursting into our mother's room, followed by the culprit, whose sparkling eyes seemed to indicate that she was enjoying Tribby's perplexity.

"I don't know what to do," Tribby went on; "I can't find anything I want. I never can lay my hands upon a single thing I want in that store-room after Wildie has been there. I would much rather carry the keys all the time than go on so."

"I think," replied our mother, "that it would be much better if you did. I never believed in the plan. You see Nye gave up her 'turn' long ago. You had better keep the keys, and I will see that Wildie helps in minor things."

So the key-basket remained the property of Tribby, as she had predicted it would.

## CHAPTER V.

As I have already hinted, butcher, baker, and other important personages were beyond the reach of housekeepers residing in Unst. There were various stores, however, where a wonderful assortment of articles was kept; and once a week a vessel left Lerwick (the sole town in Shetland) and traded from port to port throughout the islands.

For some years past an excellent steamboat, commanded by a jewel of a captain, has performed this duty, but at the time of which I am writing the "Packets" were merely small sloops, with very little accommodation for passengers. Yet by said packet one had to travel, if one did not desire to remain in the insular metropolis, where voyagers from the "adjacent islands of Great Britain and Ireland" had been deposited by the Scotch trading vessels carrying Her Majesty's mails.

Bread and meat were brought by the packets; but what sort of bread and meat was it likely to be after tossing about on the sea for two days—possibly *ten* if the winds chose to be capricious? Such supplies could not be counted upon, and never were. They were merely used as additional luxuries.

Shetlanders learn to put their hand to any trade, and most of the men can sever a sheep's jugular scientifically. Also the servants know how to wring a fowl's neck in the most dexterous manner, and can "pluck" the unfortunate biped as cleverly as any professor who performs the same sort of operation upon his pupils.

During the summer and autumn "a mutton" was always to be had if a little tact and foresight were exercised. A judicious message sent to Robbie o' Virse, or Maunce o' Taft, that Tribby "knew well they would not let her want for fresh meat while they had a 'crater' on the hill," never failed to bring Robbie or Maunce bending under the weight of a fine fat lamb. A "makin' o' tea" for the gude wife, bestowed with

Tribby's liberal commendations, would ensure the good fisherman's services as butcher being offered on the spot.

Fowls were always to be had in the same way. Fish was usually brought to the house by some fisherman's child, who had been sent with a basketful as a "present." It would have been received as a great insult if Tribby had declined such gift, and she would never have been so mean (as it was called) as to have accepted it without sending back a present of tea or meal—anything, in short, which was of rather more value than the fish. When the fishing season was at its height, and the boats were making "gude hales," it frequently happened that the presents became very embarrassing in quantity. When such was the case, Tribby sent a portion of her abundance where she conjectured there might be the reverse of an oversupply.

But that wealth of fish, flesh, feather, and bone occurred only in late spring, brief summer, and early autumn. There were the long months of the snow-season to be catered for; those short stormy days when no boat could venture on the deep, and no quadruped had any superfluous tissue to spare for man. How some of the wants of that period were anticipated, Wildie shudders yet to think upon; for not only had Tribby to superintend such "anticipations," but all the members of the family, excepting the gentlemen, were called upon to assist.

Late in October young cows, bullocks, and sheep

which had been luxuriating on the best of herbage all through the sweet summer, were brought home for inspection and—doom! So sleek, and contented, and happy they looked, little guessing why the long, sunny days had been made so pleasant to them.

The creatures had been reared on the home-farm, perhaps had been fed from the children's hands. It was horrible! The blood that flowed for days was too terrible to dwell upon! Do you wonder that Wildie's nights were haunted by four-footed ghosts, and that her pillow was wet with tears? Do you wonder that she shrank from superintending a "roast," knowing its history as she did.

Our father usually retired into his "den," and put himself upon Lent diet for a season. For a fortnight there was plenty of fresh meat; but such mincing of steak, and salting of joints, and pounding of sugar, and melting of suet, and stoning of raisins, and cracking of bones, and calls for sticking-plaster! After that, every remnant of the animals disappeared into barrels or jars, or depended in curious forms from the kitchen rafters; and it was time to "dip the candles." These were made, not by dozens, but by hundreds, and the process was a tedious, untidy, sickening one, for it was nothing but dipping wicks into hot tallow all day long, until the candles were considered thick enough.

This was work which the children could do very well. They were wont to vary it by making funny branched candles, shaped like the golden candlestick of the Temple, as represented in pictures they had seen.

These branched candles were carefully kept until Yule morning, when they were lit for a grand illumination in honour of that royal time.

No sooner were the candles disposed of than the geese were brought to yield *their* lives for winter provender, a sacrifice which they did not make willingly or without noise. After death and dissection the geese were quartered, salted, and hung up to "cure" in the peat-reek; and then for six long months the family supply of fresh meat would be an occasional fowl, an accidental fish, tinned meats, rabbit, and snipe. So much for the butcher.

The baker's substitute was a more simple affair, for bread of various kinds could be easily manufactured from the meal always kept in store, and Shetland housekeepers are famous for their "fancy breads." Leavened bread was also made. A small piece of baker's dough was mixed with flour and water, and left to ferment. When it had reached the proper stage it was kneaded into rolls or loaves. A piece of the dough was always reserved, and set to "rise" for next baking; but if by any chance the dough became exhausted or spoilt, an excellent substitute was made by simply mixing flour into batter with a little salt, and with a tablespoonful of sugar added. The mixture was poured into a jar, flour sprinkled on the top, a tight cover tied over it, and the jar set in a warm place to ferment. After a few days it was ready for use. The addition, when kneading the dough, of a pinch of bicarbonate of soda removed the slight acidity, and the

bread made from this mixture differed in no perceptible way from that which had been raised with yeast.

I have no doubt some accidental fermentation of flour and water had led to the idea of making leavened bread. It seemed to have been used in very primitive times, when such a very artificial substance as yeast was not likely to have been generally used.

## CHAPTER VI.

I HAVE spoken of brünies, bannocks, and scones. The last two are well known to all who love the "land o' cakes." A brünie is merely a thick cake, which may be made of either flour or oatmeal, and may be rendered "short" by the use of fat. A "burstin brünie" is a cake such as I have described made of a meal called burstin. Burstin is Shetland oats or bere, very highly browned, and then ground on a small hand-mill into very fine meal. Of course a great deal of the husk is mixed with the meal, and it has a very pronounced, though not unpleasant, flavour.

In seasons when potatoes were very plentiful, or when the potato disease was very bad, a capital starch, in nature closely resembling arrowroot, was made from potatoes. The disease did not seem to affect the starchy substance of the potato, for the meal was quite as good from diseased potatoes as from sound ones. The process of scraping down the tubers on a gigantic vegetable grater, washing the pulp so produced, when the starch falls to the bottom, and after-

wards drying the starch, was a long and troublesome one, therefore potato-flour was never a common item of food, unless when the disease was universal enough to make the potatoes useless in every other way.

All deficiencies of butcher and baker Tribby knew how to "make up for" by the use of milk, which made its appearance in every shape and disguise that human ingenuity could invent. Custard pudding and whipped cream stopped the mouth of all who felt inclined to protest against salt meat and salt fish. Milk is generally used by Shetlanders in what the prejudiced Britisher calls a "gone" condition—that is, when it has become sour and thick. It is really more light and palatable in that state, and delicate people who dare not for their lives drink a cupful of sweet cream, can devour that quantity of "run" cream with impunity. In all the Scandinavian nations and in South Africa milk is used mostly in its "gone" stage.

The favourite drink of the Shetlander is *blaand*. This has been called a "weak kind of home-brewed ale;" and the tourist or special correspondent who made the observation must have been considerably astonished at the quantities of blaand which a Shetlander can drink with impunity.

Wildie, who was always rather fond of chaffing the orthodox sight-seer, passed her tumbler for blaand so often, when one of the touring fraternity was at table, that at last his amazement got the better of his politeness, and he remarked, "Your home-brewed beer must be very weak, or your head must be very strong."

"Yes, I am very headstrong," replied the saucy minx of twelve; "give me some more blaand, please."

Blaand is simply the whey of butter-milk, from which the curd has been strained, left in an oak cask to ferment. It is a most quenching, delicious drink when used at the proper stage. It sparkles in the glass like champagne, and tastes a little as claret would if it possessed the effervescing properties of lemonade. After the sparkle goes off it becomes flat and not nice; but the blaand may be kept at perfection-stage by adding regularly fresh whey to it.

There is a Shetland preparation of milk which not even its exceeding goodness can justify for being a most absurd waste of good milk. The dish is called "clocks," and is merely new milk boiled for hours until it becomes thick, brown, and clotted. Gallons of milk will only produce a moderate-sized dish of clocks.

Nye was wont to prepare a dish of clocks for those guests from far countries whom she delighted to honour; but Tribulation seldom wasted milk for the sake of seeing some *savant* make a wry face before tasting, and then eat up the dishful. No, not even though the "clocks" was certain to provoke some talk about Norse habits and national tastes.

The mention of national tastes leads me to say that some kinds of fish are preferred by the Shetlanders when wind and sun have imparted to them the peculiar flavour known as "blawn." Some impartial non-Shetlanders translate the word into blown, seeing that

fish acquire it through hanging up in the wind; and such persons go even further, and say that a free but liberal translation would be "rotten." I will not pretend to affirm that such inelegant English conveys the proper meaning of the word "blawn," but I would modestly venture to remark that burstin brünies, run-milk, and blawn-cod may assert themselves wherever high game and moving cheese are permitted to appear.

The greatest trial of Tribby's life, as a housekeeper, was the unfortunate habit which her father had inherited from a long line of Norse "forebears," of opening his doors to all comers, with true Northern hospitality, never considering for a moment whether the housekeeper was prepared or not to feed a mixed multitude.

It never occurred to him to inquire whether the wanderer had dropped from cloudland or London. "Stranger is a holy name," was his motto, and he acted upon it, to the perpetual grief and consternation of Tribby, who was diffident of her own power to entertain people accustomed to feed daily on beef and malt liquor. Yet Tribby, aided by the energetic Glawthin, never failed to have a good dinner and a "prophet's chamber" for the wayfarer.

Times have changed since the days when that merry band of young sisters divided among them the responsibilities of the home housekeeping. But the old storeroom is not much altered since the days—the sweet, happy days—when the four were girls together in their father's home.

# *SEALS AND SEAL-HUNTING.*

## CHAPTER I.

THERE are but two species of seal permanently resident on our coasts—the Common Seal (*Phoca vitulina*) and the Great Seal (*Halichoerus gryphus*). The Greenland seal has occasionally been seen in Shetland, and even shot; but these were only stragglers, not improbably floated far southward on small icebergs or floes of ice from the Arctic regions. The two species named, the common and the great seal, are very much alike in appearance, and not easily distinguished by a casual observer; but a Shetlander who has frequent, if not constant, opportunities of seeing them, is never at a loss to recognise them. In many respects, especially in their habits, they are distinguished by well-marked characteristics. The common seal is called in Shetland *Tang-fish*—that is, shore or bay seal; and the great seal is vernacularly the *Haff-fish*, or ocean seal. The male and female of both species are distinguished by the prefix "Bull" and "She"—*Bull-fish*, *She-fish*.

The common seal is gregarious, and appears to be polygamous. In herds of from ten to a hundred they

frequent the small uninhabited islands, holms, and skerries, where the tideways are strong, but the ocean swell not great; and they do not seem to stray far from such favourite haunts, resting for several hours each day from the commencement of the ebb-tide on small outlying rocks, or stony beaches on the lea-side of the little islets, but almost always in such a position as to command a pretty extensive view, in case of surprise. Their food consists chiefly of piltacks and sillacks—vernacular for the young of the saithe or coal-fish—small cod, flounders, and crustacea. In June they bring forth their young—never more than one at a birth, and in the same season—on the low flat rocks close to the sea, and immediately lead them to the water, where they seem at once perfectly at home, disporting themselves amongst the waves with ease and grace equal to their seniors. For some time previous to this, the sexes separate into different herds, and during the two succeeding months in which they suckle their young, the females affect a somewhat solitary life. After that they again become indiscriminately gregarious. The adult common seal sometimes attains the size of six feet, measured from the point of the nose to the end of the tail. It is obviously a mistake to measure to the end of the hind flippers, as is sometimes done. The males are considerably larger than the females, but I have never seen one exceeding six feet.

On the other hand, the haff-fish grows sometimes to eight or nine feet, and such venerable ocean patriarchs will weigh from six to seven hundredweight. This

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"In these wild and safe retreats."—*Page* 105.

species is much less numerous than the tang-fish. They appear to be monogamous, and are not gregarious, being commonly met with in pairs. They frequent the wildest and most exposed of the outlying rocks and skerries along the coast where there is free and immediate access to the ocean, and are very seldom seen in the bays or amongst the islands, which are the haunts of their less robust congeners. They seem to luxuriate in the roughest sea, and delight to sport in the broken water and foam at the foot of steep rocks and precipices when the waves are dashing against them. They bring forth their young in caves, open to the sea—called in Shetland *hellyers*. These hellyers are natural tunnels in the lofty precipices, running or winding inwards, sometimes two hundred yards, into darkness, and generally terminating in a stony or pebbly beach. Some of these hellyers can be entered by a small boat, but only when the sea is perfectly smooth; others are too narrow for such a mode of access; and the openings to others are entirely under water.

It is in these wild and for the most part safe retreats that the female haff-fish, about the end of September or beginning of October, brings forth her young; and here she nurses it for about six weeks, all the time carefully and affectionately attended by her lord and master. Not till the baby haff-fish is nearly two months old does it take to the water. If thrown in at an earlier age, it is as awkward as a pup or kitten in similar circumstances, and does not seem to have

the power of diving. In these respects the two species differ markedly. Nor is the haff-fish so often seen basking on the rocks; and when he does take a rest on shore, he does not appear to mind what is the state of the tide or wind. But probably his usual and favourite resting and sleeping place is his hellyer, where he will feel secure from intrusion. His principal food is cod, ling, saithe, halibut, and conger-eel. Both species are exceedingly voracious, but can endure a very long abstinence. A tame one we once had never tasted food for three weeks before he died. They always feed in the water, never on land, tearing large pieces off their fishy prey, and swallowing it without almost any mastication. They do not migrate, but remain in the vicinity of their breeding-places throughout the year. Formerly, seals' flesh used to be eaten by the natives of Shetland, but not now. I have eaten a part of a seal's heart, and found it by no means unpalatable. It was offered to me as a special delicacy by an old gentleman who could not have been induced to taste a crab or lobster. By the by, why is it Shetlanders won't eat these delicious crustacea? I once put the question to an old fisherman, and his reply was: "They're unkirsn—they eat the human"—meaning the dead bodies of sailors and fishermen. (Unkirsn is the vernacular for unclean, in the sense of being unfit for food.)

I believe seals' flesh is still sometimes salted and eaten by the Faroese and Icelanders; but if one may judge from the very strong coal-tarry smell of the car-

cass, it cannot be particularly savoury. It is different, however, with whale-flesh, that of the bottlenose at least. Shetlanders don't eat it; but the Faroese do, and esteem it highly. I remember, many years ago, being in Thorshavn shortly after a shoal of about twelve hundred bottlenoses had been driven ashore, and the houses of the little town were all covered with long festoons of whale-flesh hung up to dry and harden in the sun. The natives call it *grind*, and regard it as excellent, palatable, and nutritious food. I ate some of it. It looked and tasted very much like good coarse-grained beef, and had no unpleasant, fishy, or blubbery flavour.

Seal-hunting is splendid sport—superior, I confidently affirm, to every other species of sport in this country at least, not excepting deer-stalking and fox-hunting. The game is a noble animal, large, powerful, exceedingly sagacious, intensely keen of sight and hearing, suspicious, shy and wary. You have to seek him amid the wildest and grandest scenery, where you will sometimes encounter danger of various kinds. To be a successful seal-hunter you must be acquainted with the habits of the animal. You must be cool and cautious, yet prompt and fertile in expedients, a good stalker, a good boatman, and a good cragsman; and you must be at once a quick and a steady shot. It is not enough to strike a seal; you must shoot him with a bullet through the brain, and thus kill him instantly, or you will in all probability never see him again. He may be lying basking on a rock within forty yards of

you; you may put a bullet through his body; he plunges into the sea and disappears. But a seal's head is not a large object at any considerable distance; and if he is swimming, you have probably only a part of his head in view. If you are in a boat, your stance is more or less unsteady, however smooth the sea may be. Then, however close he may be to you, it is needless to fire, if, as is usually the case, he is looking at you; for he is quite as expert as most of the diving sea-birds in "diving on the fire," or rather throwing his head to a side with a sudden spring and splash. Further, if you kill him in the water, the chances are at least equal that he instantly sinks, fathoms deep, amongst great rocks covered with seaweed, where dredging is out of the question; and other expedients that may be tried, equally, in nine cases out of ten, fail. At other times, however, a seal shot in the water will float like a buoy. It is not very clear why one seal should float and another sink. It is certainly not referable to the condition of the animal. Fat seals sink as readily as lean ones; and lean seals float as readily as fat ones. Probably they float or sink according as their lungs are or are not inflated with air at the moment they receive their death-wound.

Besides a thoroughly trustworthy weapon, the seal-hunter requires to provide himself with a "waterglass," a "clam," and a stout rod twelve to twenty feet long, with a ling-hook firmly lashed to the end of it, making a sort of gaff. These are for use in the event of a seal sinking. The waterglass is simply a box or tub

with a pane of glass for its bottom. Placed on the surface of the water, it obviates the disturbing effect of the ripple. Looking through it with a great-coat or piece of cloth thrown over the head after the manner of photographers, you can see down as far as sixty feet if the water is pretty clear; and even to a hundred feet or thereby if it is very clear. The "clam" is an enormous species of forceps, with jaws of from two to three feet width when open. Two stout lines are attached—one for lowering the clam with open jaws; the other for closing the blades over a dead seal that, by the help of the waterglass, has been discovered lying at the bottom, and hauling him to the surface. Many a seal is secured in this way, which, but for these simple appliances, would inevitably be lost. The long-handled gaff is used for raising a seal that may have sunk in very shallow water where the rod can reach him, and sometimes is found very useful when he is just beginning to sink, if you have shot him from your boat. For a few seconds after being shot, he usually floats. Instantly, you pull up to him, but find him sinking slowly—only as yet, however, a foot or two beneath the surface. You at once and easily gaff him, and then he is safe enough.

The largest haff-fish I ever shot I lost from not having a seal-gaff in the boat. I was not seal-hunting, but shooting sea-fowl along the lofty precipices on the east side of Burrafirth, in the island of Unst. Suddenly a big haff-fish bobbed up close to the boat, but instantly disappeared with a tremendous splash. Seals

are very inquisitive animals; and as he had not had time to gratify his curiosity, I thought it very likely he might show face again. We always carried two or three bullets in our pocket, to be prepared for such chances. One of these I quickly wrapped round in paper and rammed home above the shot, with which my fowling-piece—a long, single-barrelled American duck gun—was charged. Again selkie broke the surface of the water, this time at a respectful distance, but still within easy range. After taking a good look at the boat, and at me doubtless, who just then covered him with the sights, he turned fairly round and gave a contemptuous sniff of his nose skywards, preparatory to making off. Fatal and unusual hardihood! it cost him his life, for just then I pulled the trigger, and sent the bullet through his head. I was in the bows of the boat. "Pull men, pull hard!" I shouted. As we came up to him, I saw he was beginning to sink. A rod there was in the boat, but it had no hook at the end. I seized it, and stretching forward, got it under him, and raised him close to the surface. I tried to keep him up, but he slipped and slipped several times, and at last sank. I could have secured him easily enough, had there been a hook on the end of the rod. The water was very deep, and not clear; and although I spent that evening and the whole of the next day searching for him with the usual appliances, I was unsuccessful. All these conditions, contingencies, and uncertainties make the sport of seal-hunting surpassingly exciting and captivating.

## CHAPTER II.

My uncle, the laird of Buness, used to be a mighty seal-hunter. It was before the days of the modern "arms of precision," long before breech-loaders were in common use, and even before the Enfield or Minié rifles were invented. In those days, the old muzzle-loading rifle was found to be not a trustworthy weapon; he therefore used a very thick-metalled fowling-piece, which was deadly up to sixty or eighty yards. He had a splendid boat, which he named the *Haff-fish*, about seventeen feet of keel, a capital sea-boat, equally good for sailing and rowing, safe, therefore, in bad weather and rough sea, and at the same time handy to manage when rapid movements might be required, such as landing in narrow creeks, or on slippery shelving rocks, or shallow beaches with a surf on. His crew was composed of four picked men from amongst his fishermen tenants, and his henchman, who was as much friend and adviser as servant, a man of great natural sagacity, intelligence, and fertility of resource, and of prodigious bodily strength. All of them were first-class boatmen, expert pilots, familiar with every rock and reef and tideway on the coast and amongst the islands, and withal steady, bright, intelligent fellows. With this crew, my uncle was wont to start on his seal-hunting expeditions. He would be absent for a week, sometimes more, if the weather should turn out unfavourable; for the distance from his residence to the haunts of the seals was considerable. The first day would be spent amongst

the nearest islands; and in the evening he would land, and spend the night in the hospitable mansion of one of his brother lairds, where he was always a welcome guest, his boatmen at the same time making good their quarters at very small cost in the nearest fishermen's cottages. Next day, and each day while the expedition lasted, he would explore new hunting-ground, spending the nights at some other friends' houses; and so he would hunt all the islands in Blummel Sound and Yell Sound, the Holms of Gloup, the Neeps of Gravaland, the long line of precipitous coast on the west side of Rooness Hill, the Ramna Stacks, and even the distant Vee Skerries, and other places well known as the principal haunts of the seal. Sometimes, of course, the weather, always fickle in those latitudes, would put a stop to all sport. Not often, but sometimes, even with the most favourable weather, he would return "clean." At other times he would bring back a number of very substantial trophies of his prowess. In some seasons he would bag—*boat* I should rather say—as many as forty or fifty. In ten years, during which he kept a careful record of the number he shot, he secured close upon three hundred of both species, and of various ages and sizes, besides killing a considerable number more, which sunk, and he was unable to recover. The most he shot in one day was eleven, ten of which he secured. Not a bad day's sport.

I have often heard him tell with pride the story of the most deadly shot he ever fired. The weapon was a favourite fowling-piece charged with two bullets.

A small herd of tang-fish was lying on a rock within easy range of some large boulders in the ebb, close to the water's edge, to which, with infinite labour and circumspection, my relative had crept. Very cautiously, his piece on a good rest, he took a well-calculated aim at the seals, lying close together in a particularly favourable position, and fired. The first bullet killed no fewer than three, and the second ball struck, but did not kill, two others, which floundered into the water and escaped; but the other three were secured.

The most extraordinary *hour's* sport I have ever heard of was that of a young Shetlander, a few years ago. Reports of it had reached me; but they seemed so incredible, that I thought they must be exaggerated. I therefore wrote to the gentleman himself for the particulars; so I can vouch for the accuracy of what I am going to relate. I quote from his letter:

"My evening sport at Muckla Skerry was certainly a good one. I started from the Whalsay Skerries about five o'clock of an evening about the end of August or first of September 1881. When nearing the rock, I could see with a glass that it was almost covered with seals—I should say there would have been eighty or more—but all took to the water before a shot was fired, and while we were three to four hundred yards off, and were soon sporting about the boat, but keeping at a respectable distance. It had been perfectly calm for some days, and the sea was like a mirror. I fired eight shots from a short Enfield rifle with government ball cartridge. Two shots missed

and the other six secured a seal each. They were all shot in the water; and singular to say, every one floated on the surface till we took hold of it. One of them was a large fish, measuring six feet four inches long; the others would run from three and a half to five feet in length. . . . . I feel certain I could have shot as many more, if we could have taken them in the boat; but the boat was only ten and a half feet keel, and I had four sturdy oatmeal-fed islanders with me, so that you can fancy how much freeboard we had when the six seals were in our little craft. The time we were at the rock did not exceed forty minutes, and I think that half the time was expended in getting the largest seal into the boat. This was no easy matter, and attended with very considerable risk; but he was quite a prize, and we did not like to let him go."

Several things in this interesting and spirited account are, so far as I am aware, unprecedented in the annals of seal-hunting in this country. I have never heard of any one in so short a time and out of a single herd getting so many fair shots. When one gets amongst a lot of seals, swimming and diving around the boat, one shot is commonly all that you can hope for, and whether you kill or not, it is almost invariably sufficient to send the rest at once far beyond range. Then out of eight shots, to strike and kill with six, considering the expertness of seals in "diving on the fire," is, I believe, also unprecedented; and to cap all, that not one of the six should have sunk when shot, is extraordinary and unaccountable; for, as I have already

said, they sink when killed in the water quite as often as they float, if not oftener. Anyhow, Mr. A——— had the rare good fortune to encounter a splendid opportunity, and he made a splendid use of it.

A good dog is a useful auxiliary to a seal-hunter; but he requires a good deal of training to learn his work. Very soon he acquires the art of stalking; but most dogs at first are apparently afraid to lay hold of a dead seal floating in the water, and very commonly, when sent off to fetch him ashore, simply attempt to mount on him, and in consequence do harm rather than good by helping to sink him. But generally—not always, for some dogs we never could train to do the right thing—we succeeded in teaching them to retrieve. When we had brought a seal home, we used to throw it over the jetty or out of a boat with a stout cord attached, and encourage the dog to fetch him. Great praise was bestowed when he learned to lay hold of a flipper and tow the selkie shoreward; in this way, with a little patience and perseverance, the dog soon came to learn what was required; and many a seal was secured by his help, which without it might inevitably have been lost; for a seal shot in the water from the shore, which they often were, was very generally on the opposite side of an island or long promontory, where a landing had been effected; and it took many minutes before the boat could be got round; and by that time, but for the dog, the seal might have sunk, and been lost.

We tried many breeds of dogs—Newfoundland,

Retriever, St. Bernard, Rough water-dog, and Collie; but after all, the best seal retriever of the lot was a Collie. When he comprehended what was wanted and how to do it, he did it neatly and thoroughly. I well remember the first seal I shot. I had landed on the weather-side of a small island. A cautious reconnoitering discovered a good-sized seal "lying up" on a detached rock. Then I commenced the stalking, closely followed by my dog. But ere I could approach within range, one of those seal-sentinels and provoking tormentors of the seal-hunter, a herring gull, set up his wild warning scream. The seal perfectly understood what it meant, at once took the alarm, plunged into the water, and disappeared. I sprang to my feet, rushed down along a little promontory, and then crouched behind a big boulder, in hopes that selkie would show his head above water, and give me a chance at him. And he did. Raising his head and neck, he took a good look shoreward; but seeing nothing to account for the gull's persistent screaming, he turned round, and raised his head preparatory to a dive. I had him well and steadily covered; now was my chance. I pulled the trigger; no splash followed, which would have meant a miss; but the *lioom*—that is, the smoothing of the water by the flow of the oil—told that my bullet had taken effect. "Fetch him, old dog! fetch him!" I cried. In an instant he plunged into the sea and swam to the seal, which I could see was floating. Neatly he dipped his head under water, seized a hind flipper, turned it over his neck, and

towed him towards the shore. Passing the rock on which I stood in his way to the beach, he turned his eyes upwards for the praise and encouragement I was not, it may well be believed, backward to lavish on him. Such a look it was! I shall never forget it, instinct with the brightest intelligence, joy, pride, triumph. Indeed, I don't know whether he or his master was proudest and happiest that day. Alas, that our noble "humble friends" should be so short-lived!

I have not shot a great many seals. They are not now, nor were they in my younger and sporting days, so numerous as they were fifty or sixty years ago, when but a very few persons here and there owned a gun, which with scarcely an exception was only the old regulation flint-lock musket. But since the invention of percussion locks, and of the splendid rifles and breech-loaders of the present day, and still more since steamers and sailing-vessels have been constantly plying amongst the islands, where formerly they never were seen, the seals have not had so peaceful a time of it; slaughter and persecution, and the inroads of modern civilisation in general, have greatly diminished their numbers; at least they are not now so frequently met with in their old haunts, from which it is probable most of them have retired, to more inaccessible and therefore safer quarters. These remarks apply only to the common seal. The Great seal was never very numerous anywhere, and there is not much chance of his wild retreats being disturbed except by an occasional hunter.

I have shot only three Great seals; but the largest one certainly I ever saw, I might have shot, but did not—dared not, I should say. Thus it happened. It was at the Holms of Gloup—some outlying rocks and skerries off the north point of the island of Yell. There is a fine hellyer here. According to the usual practice, I had landed on an abutting point or promontory at the outer entrance to the hellyer, and sent the boat inwards. If a seal happens to be in the hellyer, he plunges into the sea, swims out under water, and very generally rises up at no great distance, to see what is the cause of the disturbance and noise —for seals, as I have said, are very inquisitive as well as shy—and in this way the sportsman in ambush oftens gets a capital shot. As the boat went slowly inwards, the men kept shouting and peering into the darkness, all eyes directed towards the inner beach, which was dimly visible. Presently from my perch of some twenty or thirty feet high, I saw, in the clear water, what they did not see, a rushing white figure coming outwards under water. Then, not thirty yards distant, the head and neck of an enormous haff-fish rose above the surface. For time enough to have shot him five times over, he gazed at the boat, the back of his head turned towards me, and offering such a mark as I never had before or since. I covered him with the sights; my finger trembled on the trigger; I knew my weapon would not fail me. I knew I could kill him easily, and secure him too, even if he should sink, for the water was clear and shallow. But, as ill-

fortune would have it, he was directly in the line between me and the boat, and I did not dare to fire. The boatmen never saw him, and of course I could make no sign. So the great ocean patriarch, having satisfied his curiosity, quietly withdrew under water.

I shall conclude with one other adventure of my seal-hunting experience. It was at the Neeps of Gravaland, on the west side of Yell. Here the coast-line is sinuous and precipitous, the cliffs in many parts being very high; and here there are many well-sheltered creeks, rather favourite haunts of the tang-fish. A cautious survey discovered twelve or twenty of them "lying up" on a few detached rocks in one of these creeks, and of course, as usual, far beyond range from any point on the top of the cliff. To get a chance of a shot, it was necessary to scramble down to the beach and out amongst the great boulders left dry by the ebb-tide, a matter of no small difficulty, and also danger. I was accompanied by a young Englishman, who was very eager for a shot. Retiring a little from the brow of the cliff, we held a brief whispered consultation. "Nothing for it," I said, "but to get down. Will you try it?"

"No," he replied; "I dare not. I always get giddy, looking down from great heights, and I could not possibly attempt a precipice like that. Do you really mean to venture?"

"Certainly," I said; "nothing venture, nothing win."

"Well, well," rejoined he, "you're to the manner born, and I wish you luck."

One can't climb or descend a difficult precipice with boots, so I discarded mine, carefully charged my trusty old fowling-piece, and commenced the descent, well out of view of the seals. The task would have been no easy one at any time; but cumbered as I was with my fowling-piece, and obliged to double and twist in all directions, to avoid being seen, it was stalking under difficulties of no ordinary magnitude. After infinite toil and circumspection, I found myself about thirty feet from the bottom; but further I was utterly unable to proceed without coming full in sight of the seals, as yet unaware of the proximity of danger. Continuing my downward course, they soon caught sight of me, and one after another quietly slipped off the rocks into the water. I made my way to the beach, and crept out as far as possible amongst the great ebb-stones, behind one of which I crouched, in hopes of getting a shot at a seal swimming, for they kept bobbing up and down in the creek. At last one fellow did give me a pretty good chance, and I brought his gambols to a speedy close. To strip and plunge into the sea was the work of a minute. But before I reached him he had sunk. This was very provoking. However, nothing daunted, I returned on shore, retraced my way up the cliff, and then across a long stretch of barren moor, to the nearest fishermen's cottages at Whalfirth Voe. A boat was speedily manned by three obliging young fellows, and a pull of several miles brought us round to the creek. Having borrowed two stout piltack rods, I lashed them

firmly together, and tied a ling hook to the point, and thus extemporised a capital gaff. We found the water not more than twelve or fourteen feet deep, and quite clear. I knew the exact spot where the seal had sunk, so we soon discovered him lying on the bottom, seeming not much larger than a good-sized cod, owing, I suppose, to refraction. I speedily gaffed him and brought him to the surface. He proved to be a splendid animal, five feet nine inches in length, and very fat. The skin, a particularly fine one, I presented to my English friend; and the blubber was converted into oil, which kept our dining-room lamp burning brightly during many long nights of the succeeding winter.

## *YULE-TIME.*

I SUPPOSE most people know that Yule was the name originally applied by our Scandinavian ancestors to the great annual festival of the winter solstice, which they celebrated with feasting and revelry and wassail "in commemoration of the return of the fiery sun-wheel."

Shetlanders do not speak of Christmas so much as of Yule. Nay, more, if you were asking a native why Yule is kept as a holiday, the chances are that his reply would contain no reference whatever to the Nativity. He would simply say, it "had aye been kept by the auld folk"—meaning his forefathers. Be that as it may, Yule is in Shetland the great holiday of the year, or at least was so when I was a boy. But Yule was not the 25th of December by the modern calendar, but the 6th of January; for in the "melancholy isles of furthest Thule," time was always reckoned according to the "old style." We were always, therefore, twelve days behind the rest of the civilised world. All that, however, is now passing away, thanks to steamboats and electric telegraphs and newspapers and general intercourse with the South; and I daresay Yule, the dear Yule I remember so well, will ere long be known and spoken of only as a tradition; for altogether life

in those islands is now very different from what it was some fifty or sixty years ago.

But before giving you a little description of Yule in Shetland, as we kept it when I was a boy, a few prefatory notices of the circumstances and conditions of life in the Ultima Thule of those days, may not, I hope, be uninteresting.

At the time I am speaking of there were no roads in Shetland, and our remote northern island of Unst had very little intercourse with the outer world, except by a post-runner who passed, on foot, once a week between us and our metropolis, Lerwick, taking two days to traverse the distance each way. Two small trading schooners, the *Magnus Troil* and the *Norna*, ran very irregularly between Leith and the Shetlands, making on an average five or six passages in the year. It was a great advance when an old rickety little sloop of some thirty or forty tons, which had been a cod-smack, was put on the passage between Lerwick and the north isles for a few months in summer; but during the greater part of the year, if one required to go from these north isles south to Lerwick, the only available means at command — unless he chose the overland route, which meant tramping over wild wet moorland hills and crossing several dangerous ferries, where the tide runs at the rate of six to ten miles an hour—was by sea in a six-oared boat, which was expensive and often very perilous. Mails from the South arrived at very irregular intervals by the trading schooners, or some chance smack that might be coming north. There was

no regular mail service until 1836, when a weekly steamer was put on for the summer months between Leith and Lerwick, calling at Aberdeen, Wick, and Kirkwall; and a packet schooner, between Aberdeen and Lerwick direct, during the rest of the year; but six weeks would sometimes elapse between the passages made by the latter.

It will be guessed that, thus circumstanced, we were thrown very much upon our own resources for necessary supplies of food and clothing. On the approach of winter, that is about the beginning of November, a bullock, a pig, and half-a-dozen or more of the small semi-wild native sheep, were slaughtered and cured. Everything was utilised. Tripe was carefully salted; black puddings, white puddings, and sausage puddings were made, together with some other combinations of meat and suet unknown, I believe, except in those islands; and the tallow was converted into candles. Ample stores of groceries of all sorts, meal and the like, were laid in from Leith; and thus preparations were made for the dark and dead half of the year.

Then as to amusements: there were, I need hardly say, nothing of the nature of theatricals, no circuses or strolling menageries—in fact, no shows of any kind. Neither were there any fairs or wappinschaws. "Highland games" were unknown, and there never was such a thing as a meeting of athletes to contend for prizes and local fame; neither were there ever any regattas or boat-races; and the native youth were utterly ignorant of cricket, shinty, quoits, golf, and even curling.

Almost the only out-of-door game known, or at least practised, was football, in which boys and lads, and once in the year—on Yule-day—many middle-aged men who had boys and lads of their own, engaged with splendid vigour and spirit. But of that more anon. It will thus be evident that in our remote and isolated home the routine life of each day was uneventful and monotonous in the extreme, except when perchance word would come, after a wild night of tempest, that some ship had been dashed to pieces on the rock-bound coasts and many lives lost or saved as the case might be. Little wonder, then, that Yule-time with its festivities, its feasting and its fun, was looked forward to by us youngsters with eager anticipation, and when it came round, was enjoyed with a zest, which it is not easy for dwellers in more favoured climes and more stirring localities to understand.

We formed a little family society amongst ourselves. First and foremost, there was my uncle the Laird, or, as he was invariably called, "the Mester," a staunch Conservative in Church and State politics and social customs—a kindly, genial, hospitable soul—in a word, a fine specimen of "a gentleman of the old school." Then there was an elderly maiden aunt, who lived in a cottage by herself with an old female servant, who had been an institution in the family for at least half a century, one of those faithful and attached domestics now unfortunately becoming so rare. And lastly, there was my father the Doctor, with a big family of boys and girls, of whom I was neither the eldest nor

the youngest. The three houses were as nearly as possible equidistant from each other—something less than half a mile. Amongst the three families, we managed to make the most of the festive season. Christmas proper, namely, the 25th of December, was "kept" by us, the members of the other two families spending the day with us; and on New Year's day, Aunt Mary had us all at her decorous and kindly board. But the juveniles reckoned these as very mild and milk-and-water affairs. *Yule*, namely, the 6th of January, was the great day, which true to his Conservative instincts and principles, my uncle celebrated much, I fancy, as it had been celebrated by our forefathers in the old house from time immemorial, and into which was crowded an extraordinary amount of feasting and mirth and innocent revelry. He also kept Auld New'r'sday (13th January); and we, the boys, were always invited to his house for the week from Yule e'en till after Auld New'r'sday; and didn't we just have a right royal time of it! You shall hear.

Certain very important preparations for the Yule festival had always to be made. We invariably got a new suit of clothes for the occasion—the cloth not unfrequently the gift of our kind uncle. But whether a gift or a purchase, it was always much easier to get the cloth than the clothes. It required a tremendous struggle to have our outfit ready in time. Our island, it is true, could boast of a professional tailor who had "served his time" in Lerwick, and understood his trade

remarkably well. But Charlie was more than a tailor; and in fact, it was a very small portion of his time that he devoted to tailoring. He was by turns a boatman, a pilot, a fisherman in a desultory and erratic sort of way, a fish-curer, a ploughman, a carpenter, a barber, a bird-stuffer. At one time he would be shooting rabbits or hunting them with a collie by moonlight; at another, taming wild ponies; at another, breaking oxen to the yoke; at another, away with "the Mester" seal-hunting; at another, accompanying some traveller from the South on his rounds with a pack of merchandise or patterns. A veritable Jack-of-all-trades was Charlie; but an honest, faithful, trustworthy soul, and a great ally of ours. I don't know how we should have got on without Charlie. He was full of shifts and ingenuity, a man of infinite resources, and withal obliging and cheerful. He had, however, a notion that he was not robust, and that continuous application at his trade was injurious to his health—an exceedingly preposterous idea, and falsified by the fact that he lived to be a hale old fellow of nearly ninety; but it was a convenient excuse for off-putting. We therefore found it no easy matter to get a job out of his hands. A month or more before Yule, the materials would be conveyed to him, with many injunctions to set to work at once, and in earnest—a thing he never did. Every two or three days a visit would be paid, to see how he was getting on: but progress was provokingly slow. He never thought of serious work until a week before Yule, and then he

did work night and day; and I am bound to say that we always did get the outfit on Yule e'en.

Another invariable and important preparation for Yule was the making of the football, Yule being always the inauguration day of the season. The bladder of the "mert" or pig, had been previously secured, carefully salted—very likely in an old brown teapot—and set away in the most remote corner of a cupboard. We shaped and sewed the leather covering ourselves; but to get the "quarters" cut of the proper shape to secure a perfect sphere, which we considered a matter of the utmost importance, was an affair of great anxiety and study. We had certain rough rules for shaping the pattern, but were not always successful in giving it just the proper curve. The leather was not obtained from the shops, for two reasons: it cost us more than we could conveniently afford out of our slender pocket-money; and we found, or thought we found, that "Scotch" shoe-leather—the only description procurable in the shops—was very spongy and too heavy: so the leather we used was native tanned—and, indeed, our boots and shoes were for the most part made of the same material. Some poor pony having met with a tragic end—tumbled over a precipice, or been murdered by a raven picking out its eyes, or smothered in a peat-bog—the skin was handed to a venerable fisherman, Magnus (or rather Mauns) Manson by name, who was particularly skilful as a tanner in a small way. The bark he used was the root of a small yellow wild-flower, which grows plentifully on light

sandy soils in Shetland. The thinnest parts of the tanned hide were always secured for our football.

A few days before the eventful day, we were on the *qui vive* of expectancy for the invitation from our uncle, which we always looked for, but were never sure of till it arrived; and we kept a very constant watch for the messenger. At last we would spy the little lassie coming across the fields. The note which she brought was delivered to our father, and commonly ran thus: "My dear L——,—We hope you will all spend Yule-day with us, as usual; and please say to the boys I shall be very glad if they will come on Yule e'en and stay till after New'r'sday." While the note is being read, we are trying to look utterly unconcerned and unsuspicious, as though we had no idea that we had the least interest in its contents. Our father reads the note solemnly, and then turns to us and says gravely: "Boys, this is a note from your uncle. He asks us all for Yule day, and he invites you to come on Yule e'en to stay till after New'r'sday. I suppose I may say that you will be very happy to go?" We make no verbal response —only a delighted smile, which he shrewdly interprets to mean he will be strictly correct in saying that, and very much the opposite if he does not say it. The messenger takes back the reply; and we bound across fields and dikes and ditches to see how Charlie is getting on.

Yule e'en arrives at last. Our brand-new suit, new boots also, and clean shirts and collars, and socks, are carefully packed in our carpet-bag by the sympathetic

mother's hands; and we transfer it and ourselves to our uncle's hospitable house, feeling very happy. Speculation is busy in regard to the prospects of the weather for the morrow, as, of course, very much of the pleasure of the day depends on the weather. The barometer is consulted; weather-wise folk are asked their opinion; and we fervently hope it will be fine. Presently, a substantial supper is discussed; and in a state of delicious excitement, suspense, and anticipation, we coil ourselves under the blankets, and try to sleep.

Long before the late day-dawn of those high latitudes, we are up and about, and in ecstasies of delight if—as I shall suppose—the morning is fine. The day's feasting begins about nine o'clock with a breakfast of the most substantial and tempting description. No porridge on Yule morning! The dining-room table is groaning with good things—a huge round of cold corned beef, savoury sausages, fried fish, eggs, rolls steaming from the oven, flour scones kneaded with milk and butter, a species of oatcake called "fat brunies," so rich and free that they will scarcely hold together, jam and marmalade, and tea with plenty of sugar and rich cream. Our excellent and healthy appetites having got an additional sharpness by the keen air and exercise of the morning, we do ample justice to the good things before us. But before we rise from the table, we have yet to partake of the crowning glory of a Yule breakfast, and without which we should not look upon it as a Yule breakfast at all.

From the sideboard are now brought and set before our host a large old china punch-bowl, kept expressly for the purpose; a salver, with very ancient, curiously shaped large glasses—also kept sacred to the occasion—and a cake-basket heaped with rich crisp short-bread. The bowl contains *whipcol*, the venerable and famous Yule breakfast beverage. I do not know the origin or etymology of the name whipcol. I do not think it is to be found in any of the dictionaries. I do not know if it was a Yule drink of our Viking ancestors in the days of paganism. I do not know if there was any truth in the tradition that it was the favourite drink of the dwellers in Valhalla, gods and heroes, when they kept their high Yule festival. But this I know: there never was in the old house a Yule breakfast without it. It had come down to us from time immemorial, and was indissolubly associated with Yule morning. That is all I can say about it, except that I am able to give the constituents of this luscious beverage, which is not to be confounded with eggflip. The yolks of a dozen fresh eggs are vigorously whisked for half an hour with about one pound of sifted loaf-sugar; nearly half a pint of old rum is added, and then about a quart of rich sweet cream. A bumper of this, tossed off to many happy returns of Yule day, together with a large square of shortbread, always rounded up our Yule breakfast.

Almost immediately thereafter, football commenced. Most of our masculine neighbours, boys and lads, and men up to well-nigh fifty years of age, were wont to

be invited; and when all were assembled on the spacious lawn, my uncle appeared, made a little congratulatory speech, and distributed drams to the seniors, and cake to all comers. Healths were drunk, and hearty Yule greetings exchanged; and then two—perhaps three—sets of players were arranged; goals were set, and the play began. Our uncle and father looked on and watched with interest the progress of the game. When goals were changed, there was sure to be another round of drams, to keep up the spirit and energies of the players, and because, as my uncle would say to his well-pleased audience, "every day was not Yule-day;" and so the game went on fast and furious till close upon the dinner hour—three o'clock—when light failed.

The Yule dinner was as ponderously substantial an affair as the breakfast. My uncle always had a choice bullock well fatted and slaughtered for the Yule festivities, as also the best wether that his flock could produce; so there was no lack of fresh meat at this season; and somehow he never seemed pleased at those times unless he saw not only ample but lavish abundance on his table. Dinner usually consisted of soup, fish, roast-beef, boiled mutton, plum-pudding, apple-pie, tarts, jellies, and creams, followed by a dessert of fruit—oranges, apples, figs, plums, raisins and almonds, which—the dessert I mean—we youngsters relished most of all, as we never saw or tasted those delicacies except at Yule-time. The brief interval between dinner and tea was all the rest we had during the

day; and by this time it may be supposed we were pretty well stuffed and used up.

But the proceedings of the day were not yet over. A number of my uncle's tenants in our neighbourhood, and their wives and sons and daughters, having been invited to a dance in the evening, they began to drop in about six o'clock. When all were assembled—a goodly company of honest fishermen, buxom matrons, stalwart lads, and blithe rosy-cheeked lasses, all dressed in their Sunday best—tea and cake were handed round. Fredamen Stickle, a very prince of fiddlers, summoned from over the hill for the occasion, was elevated on a chair on the top of the dresser in the ample kitchen, my uncle's splendid Straduarius fiddle in hand, and dancing began. Fredamen—or Frædie, as he was familiarly called—was a born musician, and handled the bow with admirable ease, grace, and spirit. His grandfather or great-grandfather was a shipwrecked German sailor, who had married and settled in the island. Probably Frædie's German ancestry had something to do with his remarkable musical tastes and talents. I have a vivid memory of Frædie sitting on his elevated perch, his head thrown back, his bright light-blue eyes sparkling, and his handsome, mobile, and expressive countenance beaming with smiles of delighted excitement, while his right hand swept the strings with well-rosined bow, and his right foot beat loudly the splendid time like a drumstick. The man's spare but lithe and sinewy body seemed to be transformed into a musical machine; and the music was

the most inspiriting of its kind I have ever listened to. It was irresistible. It compelled the dullest and the weariest to take the floor *nolens volens*. Quadrilles, waltzes, polkas, and the like were unknown and unheard-of dances in those remote regions. But reels and strathspeys, country-dances and jigs, followed each other in quick succession until eleven o'clock. Then a substantial supper was served, concluding with some rounds of potent punch. But there never was anything approaching to what may be termed excess. "Health and good-night" was drunk, the invited guests dispersed, and we tumbled into bed: and so Yule-day ended.

For a week the feasting continued, the football by day and dancing at night, with sometimes a rubber at whist; for, young as we were, we had learned the noble game, and were keen and by no means bad players. The Yule festival came to a conclusion on New Year's day, "old style," January 13th, which was celebrated by a slightly modified repetition of what I have endeavoured to describe as the Yule-day festivities.

Ah me! in writing these reminiscences I have seemed to live over again the happy joyous days of the old time; and as I lay down my pen, I cannot but think of the changes that have since taken place. How many of those dear ones that made Yule bright and gladsome have passed away—uncle, aunt, father, mother, and others of the family circle, all gone, and those who still survive, the youngsters of those days,

scattered far apart! Moreover, life in all its aspects, conditions, and circumstances has materially changed. Now there are roads and wheeled vehicles all over the islands. A powerful and commodious steamer plies between Lerwick and the North Isles. And yet more, the telegraph wires have brought the inhabitants of the most northerly of the Shetlands into immediate communication with the rest of the world. The "new style" is superseding the old, and Christmas taking the place of Yule, which latter, I sadly fear, will soon be known only as a tradition.

But after all, will the generation that is now in its sprightly youth be happier for all these changes than we were? I don't know. We had manifold compensations. Chief of these, we were all in all to one another. We knew from experience all that is implied of sweetness and tenderness and sacredness in that choicest of characteristic English words—*home*. Ours was indeed a happy home; and looking back over the many long years that have elapsed since we all lived together in peace and happiness, I can truly say, that next to the holy lessons we learned from the lips of a saintly mother, my brightest memories are associated with "Yule" in the "Old Rock," as we fondly term those isles of our nativity.

## *FOLKLORE OF YULE.*

CHIEF of all the heathen festivals which have become identified with those of Christian churches is that of Yule—the "merry feast" of Scandinavia.

It would seem that Yule was not one festival, but a series of them, and that period is still named by the Shetlanders "the Yules."

The Yules began with Tul-ya's e'en, which was seven days before Yule-day. On that night the Trows received permission to leave their homes in the heart of the earth and dwell, if it so pleased them, above ground. There seemed to have been no doubt that those creatures preferred disporting themselves among the dwellings of men to residing in their own subterranean abodes, for they availed themselves of every permission given, and created no little disturbance among the mortals whom they visited. One of the most important of all Yuletide observances was the "saining" required to guard life or property from the Trows. If the proper observances were omitted, the "grey-folk" were sure to take advantage of the opportunity.

At day-set on Tul-ya's e'en two straws were plucked from the stored provender and laid, in the form of a

cross, at the steggie (steps in a stone wall) leading to the yard where the stacks of hay and corn, &c., were kept. A hair from the tail of each cow, or "beast o' burden," was plaited together and fastened over the byre door, and a "lowing taand" (blazing peat) was carried through the barn and other out-houses.

Helya's night followed Tul-ya's e'en. On Helya's night milk brose was partaken of, and children were committed to the care of "Midder Mary."

A Shetlander told me she remembered when she was a little girl seeing this ceremony performed by her old grandmother. "Minnie (grandmother) raise up frae the fire and gaed to the cradle where our infant was sleeping. She spread her hands ower the cradle-head and said, loud out—

'Mary midder had de haund
Ower aboot for sleepin'-baund,
Had da lass and had da wife,
Had da bairn a' its life.
Mary midder had de haund
Round da infants o' oor laund.'

[Mary mother, hold thy hand
All around for sleeping band,
Hold the lass and hold the wife,
Hold the child all its life.
Mary mother, hold thy hand
Around the infants of our land.]

Then Minnie came to the bed and said the same ower us, who were pretending to be fast asleep; and a' the time she was doing sae, auld da' (grandfather) was standing raking the peats back and fore upon the

hearthstane and saying some words; but we never got to ken what it was he said."

Thammasmass e'en was five nights before Yule-day, and this evening was supposed to be peculiarly holy. No work of any kind was done after day-set, and—unlike all other evenings of Yuletide—no amusements were allowed. The smallest deviation from what was considered orthodox on this occasion was sure to bring bad luck.

> "The very babe unborn
> Cries oh dul! dul! (Dul, dole, sorrow)
> For the breaking o' Thammasmas nicht,
> Five nichts afore Yule."

The Sunday preceding Yule-day was called Byana's Sunday. That evening half a cow's head was boiled and eaten for supper. The fat skimmed off the water was made, with burstin (a kind of oatmeal) into brose. The skull was carefully cleaned, a candle stuck in the eye-socket, and then it was set aside for use later in the season. Yule e'en was the great time of preparation for the crowning festival of all. Though the family might be very poor indeed, they always contrived to have a piece of "flesh-meat" to cook on Yule e'en.

After the ordinary bread was baked, a round oat-cake was kneaded for each child, differing in size as the young ones differed in age. These cakes were pinched into points round the outer edge, and a hole was made in the centre, and they were named emphatically *the* Yule-cakes. I do not doubt that some

vague remembrance of the "shining wheel" first brought those cakes into existence. Each member of the family washed their whole person, and donned a clean (if possible, new) garment, in which they slept that night. When the hands or feet were put into the water "three living coals were dropped into the water, else the Trows took the power o' the feet or hands."

The house was carefully tidied, "no unkirsn things left in sight," and all soiled water thrown away. All locks were opened, a lamp was left burning all night, and an "iron blade" was laid on a table near the door.

Before daylight on Yule morning the gudeman of the house got up and lit the candle, which had been stuck in the eye-socket of the cow's skull. Then he proceeded with this unique candlestick to the byre and fed the beasts, giving to all a little better food than usual, which they were expected to eat by the light of that candle, and which, no doubt, they did. The next thing the gudeman did was "to go round to the folk of the house with drams," and even the bairns were bound to "taste, if nae mair," while to all he said—

"Yule gude and yule gear
Follow de trew da year."

Breakfast was eaten by artificial light, and on this occasion many a bit of hoarded candle was produced by the youngsters, who had secreted those morsels for months that they might have a fine lighting up on Yule morning.

No work of any kind was done upon Yule-day, for the old rhyme said—

"Nedder bake nor brew,
Shape nor shew,
Upon gude yule,
Else muckle dul
Will be dy share
Dis year and mair."

[Neither bake nor brew,
Shape nor sew,
Upon holy Yule,
Else much trouble
Will be thy share
This year and more (years).]

Mam Nanny told me of a girl who, "wishful to show contempt for auld ways (and moreover needing sair to finish a pair o' socks that the laird was to buy frae her), took ta her wires [knitting-needles] upon Yule-day. A' folk telld her to be wise, and some said she wad see! And, puir lass! she never saw another Yule."

I asked, "Did the girl die because she knitted on Yule-day?" and Mam Nanny answered— "I canna say, my lamb; but she wrought when she shouldna hae wrought, and wha kens mair about the like o' that?"

Football was the amusement of the men while the brief day lasted; dancing the amusement of the evening. Trows are excessively fond of dancing, and always try to join the revels, but this they can only do in the disguise of a mortal. Woe-betide the man, woman,

or child who has forgotten to be "sained," and by such omission given the Trows power to do as they will.

Once a merry young couple desired to share in the merriment in a neighbour's house one Yule evening. They did not wish to be encumbered by their little ones, so they bribed the boys (two in number, aged four and five) with extra cake and sweets to go early to bed, and as soon as the little ones' eyes were closed in slumber, the youthful parents stole away to join the dancers in the next house, which was not much more than a stone's-throw from their dwelling.

The big barn had been cleared for the dancing, and after a few hearty reels the couple adjourned to the "ben-end o' the hoose" to partake of refreshment. Shortly after they disappeared there glided into the barn two tiny creatures, scantily attired, with wide-open eyes, bare feet, and smiling lips, which said never a word. A shout arose from the youths and maidens assembled, and the older folks laughed, while one fisherman called out, "Come awa', my lambs, and ye sall hae a reel as weel as the best o' wis." The fiddler struck up the "Shoals o' Foula," and the two little uninvited guests tripped merrily up and down, their small bare feet keeping wonderful time and executing such marvellous steps that the merry-makers declared they must have been taught by the Trows. When the reel was at its height, the dancing fast and furious, the young mother returned to the barn, and no sooner did she catch sight of the tiny couple than she exclaimed, "Guid save me, the bairns!"

No Trow can remain visible when a pious word is spoken. No sooner had the "Gude save me" passed her lips than the little strangers vanished through the crowd at the door. Of course, some jokes were tossed at the mother, who, however, declared that she had left her boys asleep in bed, and never dreamt of their following her. There was snow on the ground, and snow was falling although it was a moonlight evening. An ancient dame muttered, "The lambs 'ill take cauld" —a remark which of course touched the young mother's heart, and she hastened after her children. But when she reached her own house they were not there. No, nor were they to be found in any neighbouring house. And for half an hour the parents and all the merry party searched for the children, but without success. Then folk began to whisper to one another of the wonderful steps the little couple had danced, and of the curious silence they maintained, though evidently enjoying the dance. At last an aged woman asked the weeping mother if she had "looked well to da saining."

"I never thought of it," cried the terrified girl; and then "a' folk kent it was Trows that had ta'en the form o' Jock's peerie boys."

There was no more dancing that night. "No, nor for many Yules after in that toon," for next morning the baby-boys were found dead in each other's arms in a great, soft snowdrift which filled a ravine not many hundred yards from their home. And every one affirmed that the calamity occurred through the parents

having omitted to *sain* their offspring on Yule e'en.

There are innumerable stories told of mischief which the Trows have done at this period through the thoughtlessness of sceptical or foolhardy individuals.

One Yule a large party had assembled at the Moola-pund, and "after the evening was half spent they found that the drink was aboot done, for double the number o' folk had come than was expected." "Lads," said the man of the house, "some o' you will hae to gang ower the hill for some liquor." "And ye'll meet the Trows about the Moola-burn!" cried a saucy damsel.

"Is du no feared ta speak o' the grey-folk?" whispered a youth in her ear.

"No' I," said the lass.

"Then come wi' me to the Moola-burn," he said, "and see them linking ower the braes." Before she could answer he said to the man o' the house, "Mauns, I'se gang for the drink, and bonnie Breeta here is going to follow me." Of course the lads and lasses laughed, and the good man wrapped a warm shawl round the girl, and bade young Josey take heed and no' stay lang. But as they left the house an old woman muttered, "Gude preserve them; it was a fule thing o' Breeta to speak like yon about them that is oot this night."

Long, long did the folks wait, and many were the wrathful words uttered at Josey's delay. At last he came—and came alone. Nay, more, he reeled in, flourishing two empty whisky bottles and shouting

madly, "The Trows have got the drink, and they've got the lass as weel!"

All was confusion at once. Josey would have had the empty bottles cracked upon his head if the loss of the whisky had been the worst; but Breeta, what had become of her? was a far more important matter. Vainly did the men strive to elicit information from Josey. He was utterly mad with drink, and could only shout, "The Trows hae ta'en my lass!"

"And" (said she who told the story) "Josey spakd the wird o' truth for a' that; for puir Breeta was lying in the Moola-burn, weet and wan, when her brithers fand her. She had in her hand a bulwand (a reed that grows in the marshes), and that ye ken is what the grey-folk use for horses. She was dead, puir lass, and a' for speaking lichtly o' them that has power at sich times. As for Josey, he never did mair gude frae that nicht, and afore the Yules cam' round again he was dead too."

Yule week proper is the period between Yule-day and New'r'day (New Year's day), and during that week no person ought to prosecute their ordinary employment; the penalty for so doing is bad luck for a year.

Some fishermen went to sea on the fourth day o' Yule, and the first thing they brought up on their lines was a hideous monster—half fish, half horse. This creature told them that—

> "Man wha fished in Yule week
> Fortune never mair did seek."

On New'r'day work of every kind was begun. Men went to the fishing, if only for an hour; girls began sewing and knitting, if only for a few stitches; a bit of simmond was woven; a turf was turned; a stone set up; a shilling laid by; a torn garment was mended; a new one shaped; the byre was cleaned out; the fishing gear was repaired; "everything pertaining to thrift was got under weigh to begin the year weel."

From that day until "Twenty-fourth night" work and play went hand in hand, and the merry season—given of old to the worship of the day god, given now to the memory of our Sun of Righteousness—sped to its end amid much enjoyment. On Twenty-fourth night the small family parties became enlarged, and lost much of their domestic as well as superstitious element. The young people of many hamlets clubbed together and spent the evening in the house of some one who owned a large barn, where dancing was vigorously carried on. An old rhyme warned the young men to

"Mak' the maist o' ony chance,
Yule is time to drink and dance.
New'r'smas lucky lines sood bring.
Twenty-fourth night, get the ring.
Gie the lass a kiss, and mind
Time and tide are easy tined."

[Make the most of any chance,
Yule is time to drink and dance.
New Year's Day luck should bring.
Twenty-fourth night get the (wedding) ring.
Give the girl a kiss, and remember
Time and tide are easily lost.]

On Twenty-fourth night the doors were all opened, and a great deal of pantomimic chasing and driving and dispersing of unseen creatures took place. Many pious ejaculations were uttered and iron was ostentatiously displayed, "for Trows can never abide the sight o' iron." The Bible was read and quoted. People moved about in groups or couples, never singly, and infants were carefully guarded as well as sained by vigilant and learned "wise women."

Alas, the poor Trows! their time of frolic and liberty was ended, and on Twenty-fourth night they retired to their gloomy abodes beneath the sod, seldom finding opportunity to reappear again, and never with the same licence, until the Yules returned.

All that pantomime, all that invoking of holier Powers, were but methods of "speeding the parting guest," and mortals were rejoicing that the unbidden, unwelcome grey-folk must depart. When day dawned after Twenty-fourth night the Trows had vanished and the Yules were ended.

## *A CLIFF ADVENTURE.*

When I was a boy, my brother and I used to be expert cragsmen—if I may use the term. Few things gave us more pleasure than to scale all the steep precipices, of which there was no lack in our neighbourhood. These precipices ranged from one hundred to four hundred feet in height. We were never troubled with giddiness, and boy-like in such a pastime did not know what fear meant. I daresay if there had been nothing whatever to procure, the "danger's self" would have been "lure alone." Dangerous it certainly was, and many a narrow escape we had. I shudder now at the thought of the places in which we ventured. I have often since these far-away days looked at some of these places, and wondered at our foolhardiness, and I would not for any consideration now attempt to repeat some of our escapades. But to add zest to the thing, there were multitudes of birds' nests in those precipices—hawks, gulls, kittiwakes, guillemots, puffins, cormorants, and many others. We made a fine collection of eggs; and any that we might obtain beyond our own requirements, we could always exchange with friends or dealers for others not procurable in our part of the country. Moreover, many of the commonest

kinds of eggs, as those of all the gulls and guillemots, were excellent eating when fresh and boiled hard. One of our adventures very nearly proved tragic.

We had often tried—but had always failed—to obtain any ravens' eggs for our collection. We were anxious to procure specimens, and determined that somehow or other we should. Now, be it known to those who are not acquainted with the character and habits of the "bird of ill omen," that he is one of the most sagacious and cunning of the feathered tribe. He builds his nest high up in the most inaccessible cliffs, so that it is almost always impossible to reach it except with the help of a rope; and even with such assistance, it is no easy task. We knew of a raven's nest about fifty feet from the top of The Keen, a very steep and bare precipice of four hundred feet, which there was no possibility of scaling in the usual way. Above the nest, the cliff was partly overhanging; and beneath and on both sides, except the spot chosen for the nest on a solitary shelf, it was smooth and steep as a wall. For many years, the same pair of ravens, safe and unmolested, had occupied this spot and reared their broods; but with the pertinacious ardour of boyhood, we were resolved they should no longer find that their eyrie was impregnable, and we laid our plans accordingly. It was necessary to have recourse to a rope, that one of us might be lowered down from the brow of the cliff; also a pulley, in the form which sailors call a "block," was required, for one of us would of course have been unable to haul up the other

with the single rope only; but the doubling of the rope, by means of the block, would diminish the weight and pressure by one half, and bring the task well within our strength. Accordingly, we obtained a coil of about forty fathoms of rope, such as is commonly used for the sheet of the sail of a small boat; also a small block and a strong oak stake.

The brow of the cliff was a smooth grassy sward, the turf being hard and, to all appearance, tough. We secured one end of the rope to the stake, which we drove firmly in the ground right above the raven's nest. My brother was to make the descent; I was to stand by the rope and manage the lowering and hauling up. A small piece of wood to sit on having been attached to a loop of rope and secured to the lower end of the block, all was ready for action, and the descent commenced. Slowly I paid out rope. I could not see over the cliff, but was quite within easy earshot, and every second or two the shout came up: "Lower away, lower away;" at last it was: "Hold hard;" and in a little: "All right. Haul up now."

I knew that the prize was won, and began to pull away lustily and cheerily; but when I had recovered not more than three or four yards, to my horror and dismay, I noticed the treacherous soil yielding to the strain, and the stake being drawn. I had barely time to seize the stake end of the rope. Another moment and the stake would have been wrenched out of the earth and dragged right over, and—— Well, I daresay I should have held on; I am sure I should;

but that would have been of no avail. My poor brother must have fallen down, down till the block caught the stake with a jerk, which would have fetched me over too, if I had kept my hold; and down those terrible hundreds of feet we should both have been dashed to inevitable destruction. As it was, the situation was dreadful enough for us both. For some time at least I could hold on, but that was all. It was beyond my strength now to haul in one yard of rope.

"Haul away, can't you!" shouted my brother, little thinking what a frightful thing had happened.

I paused a moment before answering. I was afraid, when he knew the truth, that he might faint or lose his presence of mind at the appalling position in which he was placed. I did him injustice. A braver, cooler spirit never beat in breast of man or boy. "Don't be alarmed," I cried; "the stake is loosening a little." That is how I put it, to lessen the shock to his nerves. "Keep still a moment," I added, "till I see what can be done." But in truth I could not think what was to be done. I could do no more than keep my place and my hold.

"Has the stake entirely slipt its hold?" he cried.

"I fear so—yes," I replied. "But don't be afraid; I can easily hold you as you are till we think what can be done."

He knew the worst then; we both knew too well the peril of the situation. Had he been only a few feet from the brow of the precipice, he might have got

up by the rope hand over hand, for he was light, wiry, and active, and his muscles strengthened and toughened by constant exercise, gymnastics, rowing, cricket, and the like. But nearly fifty feet! It was out of the question—it was impossible, and we both knew it. Moreover, we had no hope of help coming. There was not the slightest chance of any one passing that way, for the cliff was far away from human habitation, an isolated headland, a place which no one had occasion to visit. Of that we were perfectly aware.

"What's to be done?" at last I cried. "But at anyrate, don't get shaky."

Firm and clear came up the reply: "Shaky! old fellow. No! that I shan't, and I know you won't either. I know you won't let go. We shall do yet, never fear. I am thinking of a plan." And then, after a moment's pause: "I have it. If you hold hard by the stake-end of the rope, and slip the other over, I'll slide down till I reach some footing. Wait till I shout that I'm all ready, and then kick the rope out as far as you can, that it may not come down on my head. You understand?"

"All right," I shouted back, instantly comprehending, and immensely admiring the ready wit of the device. "Be careful in moving. Don't jerk. Give the rope a twist round your legs, and slip down slowly." It was not without danger that this could be done, and everything depended upon steadiness and nerve. Haste or flurry would in all probability have been fatal. He

had to disengage himself from the loop in which he was sitting, pull himself up a few feet, and get firm hold of the rope with hands and feet above the block; and to accomplish this, hanging as he was in mid-air, was no easy matter, as the reader will readily understand. In a few seconds, I knew by the strain on the stake-end of the rope, that he was transferring his weight to it alone.

"Now then," he cried; "pitch away; I'm ready."

There was no tension now on the longer end of the rope. With both hands, therefore, I grasped firmly the stake, and kicked the coil as far as I was able. "All right!" my brother shouted. "Hold hard now, and I'll slide down slowly."

We knew the rope was not long enough to reach all the way down to the rocks and boulders, where the sea was grumbling; but we had good hope that a hundred feet or so down he would find footing. In little more than a minute, I felt the tension suddenly cease, and grew deadly faint from the terrible fear that he had lost his hold. The next instant, to my inexpressible joy, I heard his far-off shout: "Right now, old fellow. I've got good footing, and will be up directly; it's all plain sailing now."

I ran along the brow of the cliff, to a point from which I could see him. I seemed scarcely able to realise that he was safe till I actually did see him. He was nearly half-way down; and we waved mutual congratulations to one another. After a few minutes' rest, he passed along laterally for some distance, and

then ascended by an easy part of the precipice which we had often before traversed. At last he set foot on the green turf, where I was anxiously waiting him. Each looked at the other's flushed and streaming face, and I am bound to acknowledge, that though we tried very hard, we ignominiously failed to repress all signs of emotion.

## *THE DENSCHMAN'S HAD.*

A LEGEND.

From Widwick to Hermaness the cliffs rise steep and high from a deep ocean, so deep that a large ship might float alongside of the crags without danger of scraping her keel. What would be the fate of such a vessel, if she were carried by the might of that sea against that iron wall, I leave you to imagine. The rocks are broken all along their range by fissures and caves, inaccessible from the land, and scarcely approachable from the sea. He is a bold voyager who brings even a boat to thread the "baas" and "stacks," submerged rocks and needle-crags, which guard the way to those haunts of sea-fowl and seals. One of the caves is named the Denschman's Had. I ought to explain that a "had" means the den of a wild beast, his stronghold: and "Denschman" is "Dane."

In old days, Shetland (or Hialtland) was nothing more than a "had" of vikinger, those pirates of the North who have so often been confounded with the noble sea-kings of Scandinavia; but while the islands belonged to Norway, their inhabitants were under powerful protection, and suffered little inconvenience

from the uses to which the sea-rovers turned the sheltered voes and secluded islets. It was only when Scottish rule came in that the vikinger of Norway and Denmark turned their weapons against their brother-Norsemen of the Shetland Isles. During the times of the Stuarts, Scotland had enough to do to look after itself, far less to extend protection to an outlying dependency that was more plague than profit. Indeed, the Scottish kings and nobles seemed to have regarded Hialtland as fair game, and robbed and oppressed the people after as cruel a method as that of the northern pirates. Between the two, those islands had a hot time of it; and the islanders, once a prosperous community, sank into poverty and hopeless serfdom.

About the time of Mary Stuart, the isle of Unst was harassed by a noted viking whose name and lineage were unknown. He and his daring crew were believed to be Danes, and his swift barque—appropriately named the *Erne*—and his stalwart person were familiar to the affrighted eyes of the islanders. When the Denschman swooped upon the isle, its inhabitants fled to the hills and rocks, leaving their homes as spoil for the lawless rover. What else could they do? The enemy were strong, reckless, brave, well armed and well disciplined. The islanders, groaning and disheartened under the yoke of an alien power, were at the mercy of might, and could neither resist nor make treaty; so the Denschman came and went like the fierce bird of prey whose name his vessel bore, and no man dared oppose him.

One midsummer evening, a westerly squall arose which sent the fishing-boats flying to the shelter of their voes and wicks. Those storms rise and fall with tropical rapidity and violence. Six hours after it was at its height, the wind had fallen to an ordinary fresh breeze, the sky was smiling as before, and only the wrathful surf, rolling white and broken under the influence of a changing tide, remained to tell of the tempest. All the boats had returned in safety, and there should have been rejoicing in Unst; but instead, men frowned and women trembled, for the fishers had brought news that the Denschman was on the coast; his well-known sail had been seen hovering beyond the holms of Gloup; he was coming upon the wings of the westerly wind; he would be on the Westing Bicht ere long. There was no landing-place available —with such a heavy sea—on that side of the island; but the Denschman knew what he was about, doubtless. He would scud to the nor'ard, fly round the Flugga skerries and Skau, would lay-to, and bide his time till dusk drew down; then he would alight on the eastern shore, and work his wild will upon the defenceless isle. Such had been his tactics aforetime. The people ran to the high lands of Vaalafiel and Petester to mark the Denschman's course, for where he meant to land, *there* they must not be.

Soon the *Erne* was descried emerging from a mist of spindrift, and bearing swiftly towards Unst, heading straight for the isle, and not—as the folk had supposed —skirting the coast. Did the vikinger mean to bring

their vessel to harbour among those crags, where the sea was in such a turmoil? Was the *Erne* a demon-ship that could dare everything and perform such a feat? On she came right before the wind with a following tide; but when well in the Westing Bicht, some experienced seamen affirmed that there must be something wrong aboard, for the *Erne* did not rise on the waves with her usual buoyancy; she seemed to plunge madly forward, as if in fierce conflict with the ocean she had ruled so long. By-and-by it was seen that the vessel laboured more and more, yet carried full sail, as if on speed depended salvation.

"I would not say but she's sprung a leak, or the like," said an old udaller among the on-lookers. "Who but a madman would bring a ship in-shore like yon, if all was taut aboard!"

"That is so," remarked a seaman. "Without doubt, he's in straits; and he's going to try to beach the *Erne* on the Aire of Widwick. It's his only chance, and a poor one."

"Pray the powers he may not make the Aire," replied the old man: "and I'm thinking," he added, "that the powers will hear us. There is something fatally amiss with that evil one. See yon! She's not obeying her helm; she's just driving with wind and tide. She's in a mighty strait, praise the Lord!"

"If she misses the Aire, she'll go in *shallmillens* [the fragments of eggshell] upon the baas of Flübersgerdie," said a fisherman, with a grim smile; and all cried out, "Pray the powers it may be so!"

As if the powers thus invoked were ready to prove their immediate willingness to answer the cry of the oppressed, the wind veered more to the west, and carried the disabled ship against the holm of Widwick, a small islet which lies off the creek, and wards from it the full force of the North Atlantic. If the *Erne* had stranded on the holm, some of her crew might have effected a landing there; but that was not the end of the viking's barque; she reeled back from the holm with a gash in her side that was a death-wound indeed, and drifted onwards once more. Now, would she gain the creek? No: In a few moments the *Erne* was carried past the little harbour, where lay the sole chance of deliverance, and then crashed among the rocks of Flübersgerdie.

"Praise to the powers that are above all!" cried the men of Unst, and even gentle-hearted women rejoiced as the Denschman, barque and crew, disappeared among the breakers.

The people returned to their homes, happy in the thought that the rocks of Fatherland had proved able protectors, and that Unst was for ever rid of its most dreaded foe.

Two days and two nights passed. No trace of the storm was left. A boat put off from Widwick with the intention of saving such portions of the *Erne* as would certainly be drifting among the skerries near Flübersgerdie. The men could tell by the state of the tides and the wind exactly where the wreckage was to

be found, and they made for the spot, never doubting that some spoil would be there to reward them. As they approached the submerged reef where the *Erne* finished her career, the skipper, alluding to the dreaded Denschman, said: "Well did he deserve what he met here! Think our isle would give him foothold!—our isle, that he has harried this ten year and more! No, no!"

Scarcely were the words spoken, when one of the fishermen called out excitedly: "Lord be about us, men, what's yon?"—and he pointed to a cave situated in the cliff opposite the reef.

All gazed, and were struck dumb, for, on a ledge within the mouth of the hellyer (cave) stood a man—the man! the Denschman, alive, stalwart, terrible as ever, and brandishing his sword, as if defying mortal to molest him.

The boat was instantly backed, and when the islanders had put what they considered a safe distance between themselves and their dreaded foeman, the men consulted together. Should they make a bold attack? The Denschman was alone; they were six in number. Surely they could overpower him, tired and despairing as he must be. Yes. But one, or even two of their number were likely to fall before his sword ere he could be conquered. Who was patriot enough "to lead such dire attack?" No one of that crew! Then should they leave him to die of exhaustion, as he must ere long? There was no way of escape. The lofty precipice overhung the cave, precluding any scheme

of climbing upwards; on either side, the *aiguille* crags rose from a seething depth of sea; in front, a reef of sunken rocks covered with fretful surf, dared the bravest swimmer that ever breasted waves to pass alive.

The Denschman had evidently reached his present refuge by aid of a large plank belonging to the *Erne*, which still floated near the cave. When they had recovered every vestige of the wreck which floated, he could not escape. It was beyond the power of man to leave that cave unaided from without. Help must come from ropes lowered from the land above, or boats brought to the cave. And who was there in Unst would bring rope or boat to aid the Denschman? None!

"Let him die the death!" said the men whose homes the viking had devastated. So they ventured nearer, and removed every floating spar or plank, then returned to Widwick; and it was told in the isle that the Denschman had survived his barque and crew only to meet a more terrible death. No man pitied him; no man dreamt of giving him succour. Those were days when the gentler feelings had little part in men's warfare, and no red cross of healing followed battle ensigns to the field of fight.

Next day, a number of boats put off, that men might feast their eyes on the dead or dying viking; and many saw him. That day, he was seated on the ledge of rock glowering at them; but he made no sign of either submission or defiance. "He grows weak," they said,

and wondered that even the Denschman's tough and giant frame had so long withstood the exposure and starvation.

A third time the islanders sought the rocks of Flübersgerdie and saw the pirate chief as before. Then they began to fear, and to say that he must be allied to potent powers of evil; for how, otherwise, could he have survived there so long? The interior of the hellyer could be seen from a little distance: no food or clothing had been saved from the wreck to be secreted there. The prisoner was always seen sitting on the cold bare ledge where he had been first discovered, and the people were satisfied that the cave held no means of sustenance.

Day by day for a whole fortnight boats were guided to Flübersgerdie, and men gazed in awe, but did not venture to molest the Denschman, who merely returned their stare with haughty glances, and never deigned to bespeak their compassion. Dread of the supernatural added its paralysing effects to the terror which the viking's fame had implanted, and there was not a man found brave enough to attack the Denschman in his "had."

Then heaviness fell on the men's spirits, for wives and mothers upbraided them as cowards; their little ones shrieked and hid their faces when it was told that the bugbear of their dreams was making his "had" in an Unst hellyer; and at last, driven by shame and a remnant of manly courage, the islanders determined on attacking their enemy. They would discover if he

were immortal; they would prove if the powers of evil were above those of good.

A fleet of boats was got ready, laden with sharp stones, which were to be cast at the foe—a safe mode of onslaught! The islanders armed themselves with staves and axes. Nets were prepared, in whose toils the Denschman should fall if he, by any strange chance, came to close quarters. The oldest udaller in the isle ordered his best boat to be launched and consecrated, to lead the attack. A day was fixed upon. It had been ascertained on the previous evening that the Denschman was still in his "had," alive and strong. No one doubted by that time that there he would remain while the island remained, if not ousted by force and the help of holy powers, or if not aided by demons to rise and blight the isle.

"Pray," said the old udaller to his three fair daughters, who stood to see him embark in the consecrated boat—"pray that I bring the Denschman's dishonoured corpse back with me."

"We will pray," said the golden-haired maidens.

But what consternation there was on the Aire of Widwick, a few minutes later, when it was found that the old man's boat—the largest and best in the isle, the skiff that was to have led the attack—had disappeared! She had not sunk into the pellucid water, else she had been easily recovered; she had not floated out to sea, for the tide was running landwards; yet she had gone as completely as if she had owned feet to

carry her over earth, or wings to fly through air. To be sure the boat had both feet and wings of a kind, but these were of use on the ocean alone. And she was gone—oars and sails too! Doubtless, her flight had been on her native element; but some man's hand must have spread her wings or moved her feet. Then who had stolen the udaller's boat? No Hialtlander to be sure! Robbery was never the vice of those islanders; moreover, such a theft could have been brought home to a native easily.

One fisherman, more acute than his neighbours, whispered: "None but the Denschman has done this:" and with common assent, all echoed: "The Denschman has done this."

Boats instantly put off and sped to Flubersgerdie, where confirmation of those suspicions was not wanting. The Denschman was no longer in the cave. He had been there, hale and terrible, on the previous evening; he had vanished that morning, and left no trace behind. "It must have been the Evil One himself," said the folk; and there was gloom in the isle, trembling, and much fear, for all expected that ere long the Denschman would descend upon Unst, and, fired by revenge, deal worse havoc than even that of former days.

But days and weeks went past, and nothing further was known of the Denschman or the udaller's boat, and still the people feared their ancient foe and looked for his return. None doubted that he survived. The man who could live in unabated vigour through a

fortnight without food or fire in a dark ocean cave, who could find means of leaving his prison, and could spirit away a large boat—such a one was not likely to have perished on the sea. Yes, without doubt, the Denschman would return to Unst; "and Heaven help us when he comes!" said the islanders.

Then it happened one autumn afternoon that a stranger vessel was seen, on the Westing Bicht, making tacks for the isle. The people had always cause to suspect an unknown sail, and they watched the stranger's approach with some fear. As he drew nearer, it was observed that he closely resembled the *Erne* of old, but carried the white flag of peace. The Norland pirates ever scorned to conceal their true character, which was never a treacherous one, but flaunted their ruthless blood-red colours in the face of day. If a viking hoisted the white banner, he meant peace; and so well was this known, and so thoroughly could all men trust in the good faith of a viking, that the islanders instantly sent off a boat to the vessel, though they suspected it was a pirate ship. The stranger had a boat in tow, and when the islanders came near he lay-to and allowed them to come alongside of his convoy. What was the fishermen's astonishment to find that the boat was no other than that of the Unst udaller!

Then a stern voice spoke from the ship. "Come not nearer," it said, in a patois half-Danish, half-English, which the Hialtlanders could interpret well

enough. "Come not nearer; but undo the tow-line, and take that boat to its owner. It is freighted with goodly gifts for the udaller's three fair daughters, who will know whence those tokens come.—And know, ye hinds of Unst, that ye owe your lives and all that makes life precious to the golden-haired maidens.—Begone!" Then the speaker—easily recognised as the Denschman—made imperious sign to his mariners, who speedily put the vessel on another tack, and before many minutes he was running out to sea again.

The islanders towed the laden boat ashore, where a throng was waiting their return. Numerous questions were asked, numerous conjectures made. The udaller and his daughters were summoned and the precious cargo displayed. Table utensils of silver, personal ornaments of gold, silken stuffs and snowy linens, rich wines and fruits, and precious grain, whatever could please feminine taste, were spread before the wondering people, while the three sisters stood mute and blushing, now cowering with strange shame, anon glancing with curious pride at all around.

Presently, their old father addressed them in grave and troubled tones: "Tell us the meaning of this strange *güdic* [riddle]."

At that, the two younger girls fell on their knees and clasped his hands entreatingly, while the eldest sister cried: "O father, do not be angered, and I will tell ye all. We heard you speak of the Denschman in his sore strait with nobody to pity him. It's true he had dealt cruelly by our isle; but—but, O father,

it lay heavy on our hearts that a man—and such a man, with such a goodly presence and such a bold spirit—should die like an otter trapped in a snare; and so, we—we went to the rock in the dark hour of nicht, and we lowered a *keschie* [basket] to him with food and cordials and clothes—everything to keep in life. And then—when we knew that our men meant to stone the poor defenceless captive to death, our souls were melted with pity; so we took the boat and helped him to escape. *We* were not afraid of the Denschman: and, truth to tell, he can be kind and gentle like other men. Or ere he left the isle—all in the mirk hour—he promised that, because of what we had done, he would never harry Unst again. No doubt, it was wrong of us, father; but then, oh, be mindful that the plight he was in could not fail to touch lasses' hearts. And if good instead of harm come of it—nay, *has* come of it—ye need not trouble yourself more, but forgive us, and trust the Denschman to keep his word. He will do so. We all know that a viking stands to his promise, whate'er betide."

"The lass has spoken words of wisdom," said a prudent matron, eyeing the viking's royal gifts; and a laughing seaman added: "Ay, and what would come of us poor men if lasses were not pitiful, and not just altogether wise at times!"

So the old udaller forgave his daughters, and—as legend says—"after that Unst was often benefited, and never more harried, by the Denschman," whose "had" is still pointed out to the inquiring stranger.

## *OIL ON THE TROUBLED WATERS.*

I WISH to relate an incident I witnessed many years ago, as it very strikingly illustrates the truly wonderful effects of "throwing oil upon the troubled waters," and will serve to show that the saying indicates a *fact*, and is not, as is generally supposed, *merely* a figure of speech which has no foundation in reality. This is well known to Shetlanders, and has often been the means of saving valuable lives. But first a few notes regarding the Shetland deep-sea fishing and fishermen may not be uninteresting.

Finer boatmen than these hardy islanders are not to be found anywhere, as will readily be acknowledged by all who may have seen the splendid manner in which they manage their fragile skiffs in a storm. The boats invariably used for what is called the "haaf" or deep-sea fishing are remarkably small, and to look at them, seem utterly unfitted to contend against the fierce storms and raging tideways which prevail amongst and around the islands. But their safety just lies in their lightness, buoyancy, and handiness. If much larger and heavier, they would, from their unwieldiness, not be so easily handled, and would consequently be in much more danger of being

engulfed in a rough sea. They are entirely without deck, and are barely capable of bringing on shore from thirty to sixty hundredweight of fish—the latter only in the case of the largest-sized boats, and when the sea is perfectly smooth. Such a quantity indeed will load them so deeply as to leave but three or four inches of free board.

On returning from a day's or a night's fishing at the haaf, the crew of six men generally haul their boat up on the beach above high-water mark, and with perfect ease. This will give an idea of the size of the Shetland fishing-boat. In form she is long and narrow and pointed, with a considerable spring both at stem and stern,—in fact just the Norwegian yawl with some slight modifications and improvements. She carries a large lug-sail on the one tall and slender mast which rises straight up from amid-ships, and is firmly secured to the stem and both sides by stays.

Right out on the Atlantic or North Sea during the summer months, the hardy fishermen prosecute their arduous and dangerous calling, their only provisions being some half-baked oatmeal cakes and a small keg of "blaand"—whey made from buttermilk. Sometimes in fine settled weather they will run seaward as far as forty or fifty miles or farther, in fact out of sight of land, out on what seems a northward prolongation of the Dogger Bank, nearly half way to Norway, which is the best fishing-ground; and then they are frequently nearly two days and two nights at sea. It will readily be understood that a sudden storm occurring when the

boats are thus far from the land in mid-ocean puts the fishermen in utmost peril, and in such circumstances it too often happens that some never reach the shore. Such summer gales are common enough, and although fortunately not usually of long continuance, they are often very severe while they last. Not seldom after the long stretch of lines has been "set," the storm suddenly bursts upon them, so that the fishermen, not having time to haul them in again, are forced to leave them. At other times, about the commencement of the gale, they will have recovered all or a part of them with a large quantity of fish also—mostly ling and cod—for, curiously enough, the best hauls are generally made just before a storm and when the weather is rough. The boat is then properly trimmed, and all made as snug as possible. The sail is closely reefed and hauled up. The skipper takes the helm and also the sheet, which rope is never confided to any hand but the helmsman's. He alone has thus the entire control and management of the craft—if close-hauled or with the wind on her beam, easing her, now with a turn of the helm, now by letting off a few inches of the sheet when a heavier blast than usual occurs, now luffing up and breasting a wave as it breaks close to her bows, now running from another if it looks too near and ugly and threatens to break on the quarter or beam, that it may expend itself astern—as to his experienced eye the emergency may seem to require. A quick eye, a steady hand, coolness and courage, and promptness of judgment, are all needed; for

the smallest mistake, a wrong turn of the helm, the slightest false movement, might be fatal.

More frequently however, if the storm is very severe and the sea heavy, the safest course, and that generally adopted, is to run dead before the wind. In that case a duty not less important than the helmsman's falls to the next most experienced boatman. That duty is to manage the "tows," as the phrase goes. In one hand he holds the halliards; in the other the down-hauler. As each great wave comes rolling on, lifting the boat high on its crest, he hauls down the sail some distance, to ease her from the strain and pressure of the wind, to the full force of which she is in this elevated position exposed. Again, as she rushes down into the trough of the sea he hauls it up, to catch as much wind as possible, that she may run from the next wave rising astern ere it breaks. It is considered by the fishermen that a cool and judicious hand at the "tows" is quite as necessary as a good helmsman.

In running to the land, the greatest danger is always encountered in crossing those tideways which rush between the islands and round most of the points and promontories, at the rate sometimes of nearly ten miles an hour. In the calmest weather, it is often impossible to cross them during the hours of full tide, and you must wait till the "slack of the tide" before attempting it. From any commanding height on shore you can trace by their course of white foam these furious tideways running far out into the ocean, while all around the sea is perfectly smooth and placid.

They are veritable rivers in the sea, and Shetlanders speak of them as "the string of the tide," and crossing them is called "*cutting the string.*" Of these streams or tideways, the far-famed Sumburgh Roost off the south point of the islands, and one near Burrafirth at the north point of Unst, are the strongest and most dangerous around the Shetlands.

It is when running before the wind or crossing a tideway in a storm—but seldom except when in utmost peril—that the Shetland fishermen adopt an expedient which has often saved many a boat's crew. They crush—or as they call it "crop"—in their hands the livers of any ling or cod they may have caught, and keep throwing them astern and around them. The effect is magical. The waves are not lessened in size, but they no longer *break*, and it is only from their breaking close to the boat, and so being dashed in upon her and filling her, that there is danger. The rapidity with which the oil spreads over a considerable space of sea around is marvellous, and scarcely to be credited except by one who has witnessed the phenomenon. Shetlanders call the smooth appearance of the water caused by any oily substance floating on it, *lioom.*

"Throwing oil upon the troubled waters" is therefore a saying which has undoubtedly originated in a fact with which very few are acquainted, but which cannot be too widely made known. That fact is simply this, that oil prevents the waves from breaking; and unless they break, though they were twenty

times as high as they ever are, there would be no danger whatever to a boat, or for the matter of that to a vessel either, except from the strain of her rolling. There would be no "shipping" of tremendous "seas" of which we so often read, no poor sailors and deck cargoes swept overboard, no smashing of binnacles and bulwarks. An expedient so simple might often be of invaluable service in saving life and property. The difficulty and peril, for instance, of launching a boat from a sinking ship in a storm are mostly caused by the wind breaking the waves over the boat and filling her or dashing her to pieces against the vessel's side. The danger of such a mishap would unquestionably be greatly lessened by throwing overboard some oil, which ought always to be kept handy. Boats also going from one ship to the assistance of another in distress, and life-boats on their way to a wreck and boarding it, might often with very great advantage use a little oil, if its effects were only better known. Again, we often read of boats adrift on the sea from a foundered or burning ship, and it is marvellous how frequently they are able to weather the fiercest storms though often greatly overcrowded; but many a time they are swallowed up, when a little oil judiciously used during the worst of the storm might have been the means of saving them.

Another case in which oil might be of the greatest service is when a man accidentally falls or is washed overboard. Life-buoys are thrown into the sea, the ship is brought to as quickly as possible, boats are

lowered and a search made; but before all this can be done, the vessel has run a considerable distance, and although the poor struggler in the water may be a good swimmer and able to keep afloat for some time, the great difficulty is to find the exact spot where he is to be sought for. A life-buoy or a man's head is a small object to descry amongst heaving waves and white foam. If life-buoys were constructed so as to contain a small portion of oil in a little receptacle or indiarubber bag attached to them, to be punctured with a knife before being thrown overboard, the effect would be not only to prevent the sea from breaking over the castaway, so making it easier for him to keep afloat, but would indicate to the searchers almost the exact spot where to look for him. His whereabouts would easily be discerned from the ship or boat by the *lioom*.

I throw out these hints and suggestions on this very interesting subject, and I do think it would be well worth while that some experiments were made to test the effects of "oil upon the troubled waters," and that the results if satisfactory, as I am confident they would be, were made widely known to seafaring men. The cost would not be worth naming; and I am much mistaken if the benefit, as a means of saving valuable life and property, would not be enormous. As one who speaks not without personal knowledge, I would urge upon philanthropists and ship-owners, if these remarks should come under their notice, to turn their attention to the subject.

But now for the incident referred to. It was a beautiful evening in midsummer. Nothing indicated a storm or any change in the settled weather which had prevailed for some time. All the fishing-boats had gone to the far haaf. Suddenly a little after midnight a fierce gale sprung up and raged with unwonted fury, increasing as the morning advanced, while the sea rose to a height most unusual at that season of the year. All the boats bore up for the land as soon as the storm broke on them; and during the early part of the day all reached the shore in safety—save one. She was known to be a good sea-boat, and was manned by a crew of the very best fishermen in the island; but as the hours crept on, and there was no appearance of her return, burning anxiety and suspense of wives, mothers, daughters, and neighbours were fast passing into the most dismal forebodings. I went out to a high promontory which overlooks a wide expanse of sea, and sentinels as it were the entrance to the landlocked bay where nestled the humble cottages of the fishermen. A crowd of distracted women, and of men scarcely less agitated, who had just themselves but narrowly escaped a watery grave—friends or neighbours of the missing ones—were gathered on the cliff, straining their eyes across the raging sea. It was a pitiful harrowing sight. Who can describe the agony expressed in the firmly clasped hands, the fixed and tearless eyes of one, the bowed form, convulsively rocking a little one in her lap, of another, the moan of breaking hearts, the wail

of despair of others! "Oh my man, my gude, kind man! I'll never see him more!" cried one. "Faether, faether! will ye never never come back again?" exclaimed a blooming girl, whose cheek was blanched enough now. "My boy—my Willie! Oh the cruel cruel sea!" moaned a poor widow whose only son was one of that boat's crew. And indeed it seemed to all of us but too probable that our worst fears would be realised. The storm continued unabated. The great waves were dashing against the rocks in angry fury, sending the spray right over us. Most of the men were sad and silent. Some of them were doing their best to keep alive the hope they too plainly did not themselves cherish. One suggested: "They have probably run a long way to seaward, and set their lines, and have stayed perhaps rather too long in their endeavours to recover them before bearing up for the land; but no need as yet to fear the worst." Another said: "Perhaps they have run to some other island which they found easier of access." Another suggested: "They are very possibly waiting outside till the slack of the tide before attempting to cross the string."

I turned to a fine stalwart young fisherman who had often accompanied me on fishing and seal-hunting expeditions, and whose courage and steadiness and judgment I had not seldom proved in circumstances of difficulty and danger.

"What do *you* think?" I whispered, as I kept sweeping the horizon with my field-glass.

"I don't know what to think," he answered. "She

was a good boat, and they were brave men and good seamen that manned her; but that is an awful sea to fight against. God be with them!"

"Was!" "were!" The words sent a chill to my heart. He was already speaking in the past tense of those for whom we looked and prayed. Suddenly he seized my arm as with a vice, while his keen grey eye, almost wild with intense but suppressed excitement, shot a glance across the waste of waters.

"There!" he said. "I thought I saw something *white* like a sail, not the sea-foam. Don't speak yet, or it will kill these poor souls! Give me your glass. Yes, yes; again I see it. Look!"—he shouted aloud now—"I see her sure enough. They are coming right on, and going to cut the string too, I do believe; a bold venture, but awfully risky, for the tide is still strong."

A few minutes more and we could all see the gallant little boat driving along before the gale, now lifted high on the crest of a huge wave, now completely out of sight in the trough of the sea. On on she came towards the string, which though it had run off its greatest strength, looked ugly enough to make the stoutest heart quail. Little more than five minutes would be sufficient to carry her across; but every one knew perfectly well that the greatest danger of all was just there in the middle of that tideway. It was the crisis of her fate. Five minutes more and she would be in safety, or never reach the shore. On on she came, now plainly in view of every one, and splendidly

handled as we could see, on on, and buried her bows in the raging tide as a war-horse might charge an opposing rampart. We held our breath hard. No one moved; not a word was spoken, not a sound was heard but the rush and roar of wind and waves or the wild scream of a sea-mew overhead. A minute of intense suspense, and still she bravely battled on.

"Ha!" cried the young fisherman at my side, "what is that they are doing? I know! I know! They are croppin' the livers! I can see the *lioom* on her track. Wisely thought of, and well done! It is their only chance in yon tideway."

And so indeed it was. We could distinctly see the men with eager hands throwing out the crushed livers astern, to right, to left, all around, as though offering a propitiatory sacrifice to the sea-god; and the waves did not break on them then. A few minutes more, and then, amid tears of thankfulness and joy, "Safe—safe, thank God!" burst out on every side; and soon they reached the shore, those hardy fishermen, and were welcomed in a manner much easier to conceive than describe.

The skipper had never left his post at the helm for nine long hours, during which he had fought out his brave battle for life with rare skill and nerve and endurance. And now, when he stepped on the beach and took up his little boy in his arms and kissed him, I did not think there was anything unmanly in the big tears which coursed down his brown cheek. A little afterwards I said to him: "You have had a terrible day,

and at one time we scarcely thought ever to see you again."

"Ay, terrible indeed," he replied; "and we should never have reached the shore through yon raging sea and tide if it hadna been our casting out the livers—*that* smoothed the sea, and, wi' God's blessing, saved us." *

* This chapter appeared some years ago in *Chambers's Journal*, and I am glad to know was not without effect in calling attention to this subject with the best of results.

GREAT NORTHERN DIVER.

THE NORTH POINT.

"Like wild sea-mews to the old rock."—*Page* 179.

# *FOLK-LORE FROM UNST.*

## CHAPTER I.

SITTING on the sea-shore, with Atlantic billows tossing fretfully at my feet, with the odour of brine in the air, and salt-tang clothing the rocks on either side, my thoughts naturally flew, like wild sea-mews, to the old rock in Northland, where childhood and youth were passed. The weird legends of Scandinavia, so familiar in days gone by, came thronging back at the call of memory, and hours went by, and I forgot that I was not in Unst, listening to stories of eld rehearsed by some "witchy wife." Then, as if in harmony with such dreams, there fell upon my ear the accents of the island tongue, and turning round, I discovered my little son in animated conversation with a stranger. It was a mere dilution of Shetlandic which the child possessed, but the woman to whom he was talking spoke with such a perfect Shetland accent that I had no hesitation in saying to her, "You are a Shetlander?"

"Yes," she answered, with some surprise; "bit am no been nort for twenty year comes Yule."

"Nevertheless, I cannot mistake the sound of our

*aald tongue* for any other;" and having thus claimed sisterhood, we were soon engaged in talk of the beloved Faderlaund.

Very frequently I make the acquaintance of other Shelties in the same way, for they never altogether lose their peculiar accent—an accent quite unlike that of Celtic races, but nearly approaching the Icelandic, I am told.

It is surprising how few people seem to know anything whatever about the Shetland Islands. One who had travelled over the length and breadth of America and Australia remarked, when I said that I was a Shetlander, "Then you must be quite familiar with the scenery of Skye!" And a genius, to whom the Hebrides is as a nursing mother, expressed surprise on learning that the Shetlanders do not speak Gaelic. This strange ignorance must be the excuse for prefacing my fragments of our folk-lore with a few remarks about our dialect.

When Shetland became a portion of Great Britain the Shetlanders adopted the language of their new mother as she presents it in books; consequently they did not acquire Scottish accents, nor many ungrammatical vulgarisms. But though the English language seems to have become rapidly universal in the islands the natives continued to cling with loving tenacity to their Norse nouns, and in some localities Norse idioms were so well preserved that they are used in the present day, so slightly altered as to be easily recognised by the expert philologist. A custom among the fishermen has evidently been greatly instrumental in keeping

those remnants alive. It was considered very unlucky to use the English or ordinary name of anything *when at sea*. All nouns were there obliged "to suffer a sea change into something rich and strange," so that conversation in a Haaf-boat must have been the most odd medley of English, Norse, nicknames, and nautical terms. I am told that this habit is still kept up to a certain extent in one or two localities, and an intelligent Shetlander, to whom I am indebted for a great deal of folk-lore, tells me that when he was a boy he was often severely reprimanded by the old fishermen for daring to use a *land* term when afloat. May not many nautical phrases have their origin in some such custom? When our jolly tars are jabbering the lingo so unintelligible to landsmen perhaps they are just mangling the language of their sea-king sires!

Notwithstanding the satirical jokes of other provincialists, the Shetlanders continue to "take pride" in calling themselves a distinct people, quite alien to Celt or Saxon, and bound to Scotland by few ties of kinship. Their habits, tastes, accent, physiognomy, are Scandinavian, and they have little sympathy with Celtic traits of character. Doubtless these marked differences were weakened at the time that Patrick Stuart and a horde of Scottish thieves infested Shetland, but the Norse element soon asserted its superiority again, and though the names of the intruders became common enough, yet the islanders never became Scotchmen, therefore the dialect only resembles the Scotch when they meet upon Scandinavian ground.

Perhaps a stronger reason than that of intermarriage may be found to explain the almost universal use of British "Christian" names. I fancy the reformed religion has to answer for the extermination of Norse proper names; for churchmen seem to have considered it right to substitute English (or Bible) names for those which their heathen converts had before baptism. It is questionable if such a course did not retard rather than advance the true faith, by wounding human nature on one of its tenderest as well as most innocent points. I have no doubt the clergy found it a difficult matter to induce a man to call his children Peter and Martha when the honest fellow was desirous of perpetuating some revered family names sent down to him from his heathen sea-king ancestors. When opposition arose it is probable that the holy men found a way to overcome the difficulty without wounding the parental feelings, for Norse proper names seem to have gone through a most ingenious process of alteration at the font. Breeta, or Brenda, became Bertha; Olaf changed into Oliver; Yaspard made an easy descent into Jasper; Osla, sweet sounding and doubtless the property of sweet lasses, was transformed into bearish Ursula; Saneva (heathen-born) was baptized by the name of sainted Cecilia; Hunder was christened Henry, and Laulie (literally a plaything) was named Lilias; Hoskauld, Ingath, and a few such names being too stubborn to twist into anything Christian or Hebrew, were persecuted to the death, and are now almost extinct.

This dialect abounds in sounds so foreign to English

ears that it is quite impossible to convey to an English reader the correct pronunciation of some of those strange utterances. Indeed, the Shetlandic "tongue" would be more vigorous than pleasing if it were not for the tender and most plaintive intonation which softens all harsh sounds into musical accord. Before giving an example of the dialect it may be useful to mention how some of the principal letters are usually pronounced.

A is usually spoken long, as in "far," or as "au" in "haughty," when it occurs in such words as dale or vale, thereby converting them into *daul* and *vaul*.

*I* frequently becomes *e*; for example "die," "dee."

*O* and *oo* are generally pronounced as *eu* is in French, or *ü* and *ö* in German.

*Ing* seldom gets justice, for it is invariably cut short at *n*; but *r* is never permitted to hide the smallest flourish of his barbarian person, and is even obtruded sometimes where he ought to have no place, as in "fatigue" which is pronounced "fortig," the *r* being rolled under the tongue like a sweet morsel.

*D* always takes the place of *th*, as in "that" becoming "dat," and a favourite sound is the guttural *ch* as in loch (Scotch), so that "thought" is said "tocht."

*Sch* (German pronunciation) is often used for *sh*.

*J* takes the German sound of that letter generally, and there is a tendency to emphasise the endings of words by the use of firm-sounding consonants, so that "Jaspar" becomes on the natives' tongue "Yaspard" in spite of kirk and clergy. I think this *y* sound of *j* is a great favourite, for it is found twisted into words

in such a way as to inflict serious injury upon the English voice that is hardy enough to attempt to repeat them.

Here are a few words where it occurs.

Heljabrön—Holy water, or holy burn.

Heljeesam—A pleasant companion.

Bjauch—The weather-bow of a boat.

Jerta—My dear, or dear heart.

Viljarue—Foolish talk.

Gulja—The maiden who assists at the baptismal service.

Heljacröse—Churchyard.

Kjurkasoochen—Those who have had decent burial.

The following paragraph would be easily understood by any native, and contains a number of nouns in common use. The English mode of spelling and accentuation are used, of course, unless where the sound to be represented is foreign. In such cases it seems best to apply German accents.

"Ae da hümeen as I wis smooen me ower da stiggie into da strodie I fand a pellit rül baffin himsel we a maischie roond his fit. I wiz for fram we da Oy's ferdémate in a peerie bjödie ae da wan haund an a taueg o' mell ae da tidder; bit I lunt me kischie upa da roogie o' fœlls, an set da bjödie an da taueg aside him, an dan I klikkit pür Snewgie oot o his straff. Dan I geed me gate lavin him lukin as deskit as if da Guy-kerls had been flitten pates apa him au neicht."

The English of that would be something like this:

"In the twilight, as I was stealing over the stile into the road, I found a ragged young pony struggling with a straw net around his foot. I was going a distance with the grandchild's journeying food in a little basket in the one hand, and a small basket of meal in the other, but I leant my peat basket upon the mound of sods, and set the bjödie and the taueg beside it, and then I snatched poor Snewgie" (means ill-favoured, and is a common name for a pony) "out of his difficulty. Then I went my way, leaving him looking as tired and downcast as if the giant's wives had been using him for carrying peats all night."

When talking of some Unst words to an antiquarian friend I chanced to mention "hümeen" (twilight), and the scholar, wise in such matters, delighted my soul by pointing out the origin of the word. In ancient Norse "hüm" meant dusk or dark, and there was supposed to be a sort of Hades or Shadowland, named "hüm." It was customary to put the article "en" (the) as an affix when the noun was desired to be very emphatic. Thus "hümeen" is simply "the twilight," and is as familiar a term in Unst to-day as "gloamin" is in Scotland. I have no doubt that a little scholarly research would bring to light in Unst many words as purely Norse as "hümeen." Indeed, I feel sure that all Shetland furnishes a most interesting field for the student of northern antiquities, and may even be termed a *terra incognita* in some respects, and there the *savant* may find valuable relics of ancient times. I do not mean such antiquities and relics as rusty swords, arrow-

heads, and cracked china. I mean fragments of Scandinavian language, poetry, history, religion, superstitions. Would that I were learned enough to make a proper use of the numberless legends, bits of song, idioms, words—all once so familiar. Fortunately I have preserved a few of those "remains," which may serve as broken links that some one wiser than I can weave into a connecting chain between the modern Shetlanders and the Norsemen, whose blood is still the reddest drop of that mixed fluid which permeates British veins—or, as a Shetlander would express it, "Wir yatlin-blöd comes frae da Norne stock" ("Our reddest, readiest blood comes from the Norse ancestry").

I am indebted to the experiences of a sick-room for a great portion of my folk-lore; among the rest, for an incantation which nearly killed me! Having "supped on horrors" of Mam Kirsty's concocting, it was not wonderful that I was attacked by nightmare of an aggravated description. Evidently the old nurse did not believe that the scream I gave proceeded from physical causes, for she immediately set to work to exorcise the demon steed. Pulling from my head the longest hair it possessed, and then going through the pantomime of binding a refractory animal, she slowly chanted this spell:—

| | |
|---|---|
| Da man o meicht | The man of might |
| He rod a neicht, | He rode all night, |
| We nedder swird | With neither sword |
| Nor faerd nor leicht, | Nor food nor light, |
| He socht da mare, | He sought the mare, |
| He fand da mare, | He found the mare, |

| | |
|---|---|
| He band da mare<br>We his ain hair. | He bound the mare<br>With his own hair, |
| An made her swear<br>By midder's meicht, | And made her swear<br>By mother's might |
| Dat shö wad never bide a neicht<br>Whar he had rod, dat man o' meicht. | That she would never abide a night<br>Where he had ridden, that man of might. |

Notwithstanding the dame's soothing "Noo, my dear; shö'll no trouble you mair," I went off into hysterics, doubtless produced by vain efforts to restrain unseemly mirth; and I fear poor Mam Kirsty's faith in her incantation must have been shaken in consequence. There are different versions of this incantation, and I forget which it was that the old nurse used on the occasion mentioned. Therefore, I have given the one which is most familiar to me, and which seems more Scandinavian (or I should, perhaps, say, more *heathen*) than the other. It was considered very rash—even sinful—to mention the name of a dead person, as the individual was likely "to appear" to the one who had named him. Also it was considered unsafe to name people who were believed to have dealings with the unseen world. Probably some such reasons have prevented the hero of the incantation from receiving any more particular designation than that of "the man o' meicht."

It is true in the other version there is an "Arthur Knight" mentioned, and he is represented as riding with "drawn sword and candlelight," but that is evidently a later version applying to some king-honoured, church-blessed knight.

"We nedder swird nor faerd nor leicht" seems more

like the way that the heroes of Scandinavian mythology went forth to fight the powers of evil, armed by their own God-like strength alone. I have always liked to fancy that this mighty conqueror of Valkyrur was Baldur the Beautiful, whose mission was to subdue evil, and to bring peace and sunshine. Born of the goddess Freija, whose knowledge and power seem to have been almost as much acknowledged as that of Odin, Baldur could not make the phantom steed (or battle maiden) swear by aught more binding than "mother's might." Also binding the brutal power of this evil being with "*his* ain hair"—those wonderful golden locks that were the admiration of gods and men —seems more fitting than binding "the mare wi' *her* ain hair," as the later version has it.

To be cognisant of the supernatural is supposed to be hereditary in some families, the members of which are treated with especial consideration in consequence. Those privileged individuals are gifted with second-sight, and power to call up spiritual appearances, but they are very reluctant to speak of any of their dealings with the unseen worlds, so that it has only been by the most ingenious and patient course of questioning that I have elicited personal experiences, or even family traditions, from any of the witchy tribe. Degenerate scions of those "wise" folk have not scrupled to impart the knowledge given to them in some weak unguarded hour, and in that way the desired information regarding many hidden things has been obtained.

## CHAPTER II.

HAVING been always keenly interested in the Trows (or Drows), of whom numerous stories are extant, I made friends with the husband of a witch, hoping that he would be able to tell me something of their history. He was employed in building a boat at the time, I remember; and I used to seat myself for hours beside his simmering tar-kettle plying him with questions which he answered readily enough. I never dared to conjecture what his wife would have said, or done, if she had known that the secrets of her profession were being poured into the ears of the "doctor's bairn." The following imperfect account of the Trows is chiefly collected from the old boat-builder's endless yarns.

### TROWS.

This interesting race of supernatural beings is closely allied to the Scandinavian Trolls, but has some very distinctive characteristics of its own. The Trow is not such a mischief-making sprite as the Troll, is more human-like in some respects, and his nature seems cast in a morbid, melancholy mould. We cease to wonder that it should be so when we learn that there are no female Trows. Fancy a world peopled by men alone! To be sure the Turk's heaven is such, but then he admits the Houris. Now the Trows do not have even pretty "puffs of gas" to enliven their Paradise. They only marry human wives, and as soon as the baby Trow is born the hapless young

mother pines and dies. No Trow marries twice—in that respect they are far in advance of the race from whom they take their brides, so that their period of matrimonial felicity is very brief. It seems a wise arrangement that there should never be more than one son to inherit the questionable character of a Trow. Were it otherwise, men might fear that the race would become too numerous and powerful. On the other hand, to provide against its extinction, no Trow can die until his son is grown up. Some philosophers of this species have tried to live a bachelor life under the pleasing impression that thus they might become immortal; but the wise law of this wise people has a statute to meet even such an emergency as that. The Trow who postpones matrimony beyond reasonable limits is outlawed until he brings to Trowland an earthly bride. The horrors of such a position must be worse than death, for seldom has a Trow been known to brave all consequences and become an outcast from his nation. I was told of one who, rebellious and impenitent, took up his abode in a ruined Broch, and for centuries was the terror of every one in the island. The only food he used was earth, which he formed into perfect models of fish, birds, cattle, children, and then gobbled them up with seeming relish. For a long time it was believed that these models were real creatures *done brown*, but some one was lucky enough to discover the truth, and after that the fear of the Trow began to abate. He seems to have tired of his solitary life to a certain degree,

and met the advances of human beings with a sort of pleasure. But his love of mischief usually brought all friendly overtures to abrupt conclusions. A witch who craved to know all the secrets of Trowland was rather assiduous in cultivating the old bachelor's acquaintance, and after a time she persuaded him into marrying her—he relying upon the assurance that *her* "art" knew how to prevent the death he dreaded. We know what happened to another who was similarly beguiled by a woman's tongue.

I greatly regret that an authentic account has not been preserved regarding this Trow's further history, but it breaks off at his marriage, and nothing further is known than that from this remarkable couple sprang a race differing from ordinary Trows, and soon becoming known by the name of Finis.* Those beings appear before a death, personating the individual who is to die. Sometimes they are seen by the person himself, sometimes by his friends, more often by "unchancie folk." If we were acquainted with the moral government of Trowland we should doubtless discover some profound theory why the Finis should be the offspring of a Trow who feared death. The witch, whose charms proved so irresistible to the bachelor Trow, is said to have paid a clandestine visit to her mother, and to have divulged on that occasion many secrets hitherto unknown to mortals. She had evidently created no

* "Finis." Certainly this word is the same as that which often appears at the end of a volume. A Finis being the apparition which appears before death, before *the end.*

little sensation among the Trows—if we may take her mother's word—but we cannot suppose that she had found the life altogether so agreeable as the one she had quitted, for she gave many instructions how to provide against the enchantments used by Trows for the purpose of decoying unsuspecting girls into their unhallowed domain, and her parting advice was, "Noo, mam, mind ye hae da pör lasses weel cöst-aboot whan da grey womman-stalers are waunderin."

I understand the Trows to be a speculative race, for their eagerness to become possessed of human female *infants* seems boundless. Evidently they ponder deeply on the inconveniences attending their want of wives and daughters, and perhaps they experiment in the "bringing up" of girls. Much trouble would be saved if they restricted their experiments to grown women, but experience, doubtless, has taught them that children who never knew another land or life than that of the Trows would be more reconciled to it than the brides who are torn from earthly homes in the flower of their age. Some instances have been known of girls, who had been carried away in infancy, coming back in maiden prime with a wild unearthly beauty and glamour on them, and an unbroken silence regarding the land of their captivity. But they never came back to live. They seemed to have but the choice between death and the Trows, and they preferred "to follow death."

There are certain precautions taken by careful nurses to preserve baby girls from the Trows. If the necessary

steps are not taken, be sure both mother and child will be snatched away. The following is one of many stories told.

The husband had gone to the fishing, and the old woman "in charge" ran over to a neighbour's cottage to gossip over a cup of tea, while mother and child were sleeping. The tea was potent, and the gossip well-spiced, and twilight had deepened before the old nurse thought of returning to her patient. As she neared the door she saw a small man *in grey* crossing the little kail-yard at the back of the house. He carried a heavy burden on his back, and a smaller one in his arms, and the old woman guessed the truth at once. Hurrying indoors with many misgivings she found a dead changeling and a mad wraithe where the mother and baby had been. Alas! had she only remembered to lay crossed straws on the threshold, or place a circle of pins in the pillow, all had been safe. Shrieking, "Da Trow! da Trow!" she flew to alarm her neighbours, who thronged into the cottage right speedily. But all were powerless against supernatural agency. For a whole day the raving semblance of a woman sat huddled on the pillow, staring at the dead infant in her arms, which no one was permitted to remove. At the end of that time she saw fit to follow its example; and when the husband came home he was shown the lifeless bodies, and was assured that they were "none of his." In his ignorant grief the poor fellow refused to receive such a statement, and, after giving the dead Christian burial, he and the brothers of his wife treated

the old nurse to a sort of lynch-law, for having (he affirmed) neglected her charge so as to cause the baby's death, which had "crazed da pör midder and hastened her end." As this husband contracted a second marriage, we must hope that No. 2 will escape the fate of No. 1, as a meeting in Trowland between the two wives might be awkward. Still more awkward would it be if the first wife were to return, for, deeply as the husband mourned her, I fear he is not prepared to welcome his lost spouse if she comes back to prove that the old nurse's statement was a true one.

The name of Trow has been superseded by that of Fairy, but the characteristics of the race have never changed, and a Shetland fairy is quite different from Shakespeare's English dainty creatures, and from Lover's queer Irish ones. It does not even resemble a Scotch brownie. Some of the old men used to sing wonderful lays of this unique fairyland which is located under the green knowes or sunny hillsides. The music of such songs was of a peculiarly wild, sweet kind, and the accompaniment was always played on the violin (an instrument so familiar that every Shetland boy learned to play upon it). Having once picked up a few verses of one of these ballads, I was anxious to procure all of it, but have been unsuccessful as yet. However, the greater part of the lay has been given me by my brother who inherits the family love of such lore. Here are the stanzas, with his remarks :—

"Der lived a king inta da aste,
Scowan ürla grün ;

Der lived a lady in da wast,
Whar giorten han grün oarlac.

Dis king he has a huntin gaen,
Scowan ürla grün ;
He's left his lady Isabel alane,
Whar giorten han grün oarlac.

Oh ! I wis ye'd never gaen away,
Scowan ürla grün ;
For at your hame there's döl an' wae,
Whar giorten han grün oarlac.

For da King o' Ferrie we his daert,
Scowan ürla grun ;
Has pierced your lady to da hert,
Whar giorten han grün oarlac."

Some stanzas here are forgotten, but the substance of them is that the lady is carried off by the fairies, and the disconsolate king sets out in search of her. One day, in his wandering quest, he sees a company passing along a hill-side, and he recognises amongst them his lost lady. They proceed to what seemed a great "ha'-house," or castle, on the hillside, the king following :—

"And aifter dem da king has gaen,
Scowan ürla grün ;
But whan he cam it was a grey stane
Whar giorten han grün oarlac.

Dan he took oot his pipes ta play,
Scowan ürla grün ;
Bit sair his hert we döl an' wae,
Whar giorten han grün oarlac.

And first he played da notes o' noy,
Scowan ürla grün ;
An' dan he played da notes o' joy,
Whar giorten han grün oarlac.

An' dan he played da göd gabber reel,
Scowan ürla grün ;
Dat meicht hae made a sick hert hale,
Whar giorten han grün oarlac."

Some stanzas here are also forgotten, their purport being that a messenger from behind the "grey stane" now appears, and, in the name of the King of the Fairies, invites the king thus :—

" Noo come ye in inta wir ha',
Scowan ürla grün ;
An' come ye in among wis ā',
Whar giorten han grün oarlac.

Now he's gaen in inta der ha',
Scowan ürla grün ;
An' he's gaen in among dem ā'.
Whar giorten han grün oarlac.

Dan he took oot his pipes ta play,
Scowan ürla grun ;
Bit sair his hert we döl an' wae,
Whar giorten han grün oarlac.

An' first he played da notes o' noy,
Scowan ürla grün ;
An' dan he played da notes o' joy,
Whar giorten han grün oarlac.

An' dan he played da göd gabber reel,
Scowan ürla grun;
Dat meicht hae made a sick hert hale,
Whar giorten han grün oarlac.

Noo tell ta us what ye will hae
Scowan ürla grün ;
What sall we gie you for your play,
Whar giorten han grün oarlac.

What I will hae I will you tell,
Scowan ürla grün ;
An' dat's me Lady Isabel,
Whar giorten han grün oarlac.

Yees tak your lady an' yees gaeng hame,
Scowan ürla grün ;
An' yees be king ower a' your ain,
Whar giorten han grün oarlac.

He's ta'en his lady an' he's gaen hame,
Scowan ürla grün ;
An' noo he's king ower a' his ain,
Whar giorten han grün oarlac."

"Probably there have been some stanzas between the first and second verses, as above. Surely," says my brother, "there would be something to tell of the king's wooing and bringing the lady from the 'wast' to his eastern home, but I am quite sure there was never any such verses in the ballad as sung by old Andrew Coutts, and I always used to wonder at it and speculate in my boyish mind on the connecting links which seemed wanting."

The second and fourth lines in each stanza are spelt phonetically, with the addition of German accents on the "o" and "u." We do not know what the words mean, but I think our father's opinion was that "Scowan ürla grün" signified the king's title or titles; "ürla" might be a corruption of "jerl" (earl). "Whar giorten han grün oarlac" he fancied meant,

"Where the green fields are," or, "Where the green grass grows." Unfortunately, our father seldom troubled himself with tracing corrupt dialect to its fountain-head, but preferred studying old languages as he found them in books; consequently, the only Shetlander competent to give a true translation of such Norse remains as we possess has taken his knowledge with him to the Silent Land.

My brother gives the following description of a curious game of forfeits, which, he says, "used to be played on winter evenings, not, so far as I recollect, special to any particular day of the year, or to any festival, heathen or Christian. A lowan taund (blazing peat), or anything that would do duty as a lighted torch, was held forth by No. 1 of the players towards No. 2, the following being the form of rhyme passing between them:—

No. 1. Whaul buy me Jocky-be-laund?
No. 2. What an' he dees ata me haund?
No. 1. De back sall bear da saidle baund,
Ower stocks an' stanes
An' dead men's banes,
An' a sall lie upon dy heed at anes,
If do lets me janty Jocky edder dee or fa!

This is repeated with the utmost rapidity, and if concluded before the torch goes out, No. 2 must instantly seize it. He then turns to No. 3 with the same interrogatory, 'Whaul buy me Jockey-be-laund?' replied to as before. He in whose hand the torch goes out pays the forfeit, whatever may have been fixed. I rather think that there was a special form of

forfeit in the shape of piling a lot of rubbish on the back of the unfortunate person who chanced to hold the torch when it went out—he standing on all fours to represent a horse. It was a sort of saddling and burdening him."

I ought to explain the use of "de," "dy," and "do" in the rhymes of "Jocky-be-laund." These words are the "thee, thy, thou" which take the place of "you," &c., in all familiar or affectionate conversation. This form of address is commonly used in Shetland, as in Germany and France.

## CHAPTER III.

I AM indebted to my old nurse for a great many stories of Trows and witches. Also for one or two Norse rhymes. Some of the Norse words in those rhymes have been lost, and Lowland Scotch substituted, but there is a great deal of the true Norland sound left. Here are three verses (alas! all that is remembered of what I am told was a long ballad or song) which carry me back to happy infancy, when the voice that chanted was clear and youthful :—

"Saina poba wer-a
Leetra mavie, Leetra mavie,
Saina poba wer-a
Leetra mavie drengie.

Daala stuy-ta stonga rara
Oh—badeea, oh—badeea,
Daala stuy-ta stonga rara
Oh—badeea moynie.

Wher der isno topshag
Topshag, topshag,
Wher der isno topshag
Shakda cole o Gamblie."

No Shetlander can inform me what those lines mean. I hope the "wise men" may be able to correct them. The following short dialogue is preserved as a specimen of "wir auld tongue":—

| | |
|---|---|
| "Morian, arra dooenya?" | (Marian, are you in?) |
| "Yo!" | (Yes.) |
| "Skölaug dine cür füren?" | (Shall I *flit* your cows with mine?) |
| "Yo, gerrasso, gerrasso!" | ("Yes, do so, do so.) |

"Flitting the kye," I may here mention, is a very important duty, for the cattle are always tethered, and soon eat up all the grass within the circle of their chain, so that they require to be often visited and moved to fresh pasture.

Can any one solve this riddle for me?

"Bunye sits upo tappa tirl;—
Calye inta bamba birl,
Ba hilkie toonie;
Ladyco hilka tilta,
Roonin oondie cong ga loo!
Ba hilkie toonie."

Two "bits of rhyme," which we picked up when children, are still quite fresh in my memory. An old woman, celebrated for her uncanny power, assured me that one of these was a potent spell to guard against malediction, and the other ought to be used when children seemed led by the Powers into evil ways! I

rather think the shrewd old dame was making fun of me, for when I repeated to my father what she had said, he laughed heartily, and called the *spells* nursery rhymes "allied to Norse, as dog-Latin is allied to Latin." Be that as it may, I venture to give the rhymes, hoping that some one may be able to *make sense* out of them. Here is old Janet's antidote for cursing one's enemies:

"Bis, Bis, Byo!
Bulva reeka tyo
Tak laigen,
Slogan veggin;
Bulva reeka tyo."

The following is the verse which I was told would preserve young people from being led by evil spirits into the way of sinners:

"Clapa, clapa süda
Boochs ina schöl ina Bjöda
Bauta deema kjota schin
Swala clovena vjenta in
Roompan pöman söda."

Some tunes are supposed to have been taught by Trows, and are known as the *Ferry-tüns.* One sweet, simple, fanciful *reel* was learned by a man one night when he was passing over a hill in Unst. He heard the Trows playing inside of the hill, and he listened until he had mastered their melody. Little did the tiny misty spirits guess that an earth-born fiddler was stealing their music. Of another tune Nurse says it was learned thus:—"An old man, sitting out of doors

one summer evening, saw a party of Trows coming lightly over the marshy ground close by. As they skipped along they sang, 'Hupp horse handocks, and we'll ride on Bulmints.' The old man instantly called out, 'I'll ride with you.' Thereupon they carried him off and kept him for a twelvemonth, and then they put him back on his own roof, but he never told what he had seen or heard while visiting Trowland. Evidently there was an *awe band* upon him." But the tune which the Trows sang, when he desired to join their sport, was remembered and taught to others, and is now known as one of the Ferry reels. Another tune is called "Be nort da deks o' Voe," because it was heard near that place.

I am afraid Trows must be very capricious creatures indeed, for there was evidently no calculating on their tempers. Their freaks were endless. It is told of a girl, that, in the saucy merriment of youth, she was wont to run to the fairy knowes, and call to the Trows to come and fetch her to see their wonderful home. This she did frequently, and at last the irritated Trows breathed upon her, and she became paralysed in the limbs, and remained so all her life.

There was a Trow called Broonie, who was supposed to be the King of Trowland. He showed himself very often; and it was remarked that if he had been seen in a corn-yard all was sure to be right there, but if the visitant was an ordinary Trow, mischief ensued. You may be sure folks were glad when Broonie paid them a visit, and they were careful not to go near any of the

corn which he had been guarding, as it was observed that he objected to being overlooked, and resented such interference by *laying the screws in herda* (scattering the corn stacks). Broonie seemed to have taken a whole neighbourhood under his protection, and was seen gliding from yard to yard in the cold evenings, casting his spells upon the crop. The people felt sorry for Broonie, exposed to the chill night air, so they made a cloak and hood for him, and laid it in a yard which he frequented. Broonie took the well-intentioned gift as an offence, for he was never seen again.

Any woman who has been fortunate enough to see a Trow affirms that he always appeared to walk—or rather skip—backwards. He seemed to have no difficulty in doing so, but got over the ground as quickly as if he had been moving along like an ordinary mortal. I dare say those who have frequently to appear before royalty would wish to take lessons from a Trow in the art of walking backwards. I have noted that *men* usually see Trows moving forward after the common way, and I have no doubt the seeming eccentricity is simply a mark of good breeding, for Trows evidently honour the gentle sex.

There was a girl, whose mother had been taken by the Trows at the girl's birth, who grew up to be a lovely creature, with golden hair. Such hair had never been seen in Unst, so long, soft, shining. It fell in golden waves about her, and such an unusual mode of wearing it created much wonder. No maiden—not even a child—ever permitted her hair to fall as it pleased

except this girl, and folks did say that whenever she tried to bind it to her head the bright locks refused to obey her fingers, and slowly untwined themselves until they became natural ringlets again. The girl was a sweet singer—and singing is a fairy gift—and she would wander about, lilting merrily to herself, while neighbours wondered, and young men lost their hearts. It was believed that the girl was under the special care of Trows, for everything seemed to be smooth before her, and her golden hair was called "the blessing o' them that loves her." But it happened that a witch began to covet the maiden's lovely locks, and one day, when the girl lay down among some hay and fell asleep, the witch cut off all her beautiful hair. The poor young thing returned to her home shorn of her glory, and after that she pined away. All the song had died from her lips, all the smile had gone from her young face. But when she lay dead, in her teens, folks said that the golden hair began to grow again, and had grown to its former length and beauty ere the coffin-lid was closed upon her. The witch did not triumph, for the Trows, who had loved and watched over the motherless girl, took possession of the malignant old hag and punished her as she deserved. She was compelled to wander about their haunts and to live in the most strange manner. She was haunted day and night by evil creatures. Whenever she tried to sleep the Trows would come and make such queer noises that she could not rest. She continued in that state till extreme old age, when she was spirited away altogether.

Another legend which was told me is that of "The white sea-bird." A boat started one summer morning from the Broch of Colviedell, intending to remain at the haaf-fishing for two days. But the men had scarcely launched their boat, had scarcely stepped the mast, when a white gull came hovering overhead, and as soon as the boat was fairly under way, alighted on the rigging. Folding its wings, it fixed its dark eyes upon the boat with an almost human intelligence in its expression, and as the boat sailed on, the bird sat motionless overhead. Night came down, but still the bird remained watching the men at their work. About midnight a sudden squall came on, which grew into a storm that lasted two nights and a day. The boat dared not attempt reaching the shore for the tideways across her path. The only safety was in remaining out at sea, and during all that time the little boat lay tossing among the billows, with the white bird sitting upon the mast. When the storm abated the boat sought her haven, and not until she reached the beach did the bird take wing. As soon as they landed, one of the men said, "Give the bird the best cut of our ling, for she never left us in our trouble, and likely she has been our preservation; for yesterday, when we were in the heart of the storm, I saw an old woman sitting on the water a little way from the boat, and *she appeared not good.* But of course she had no power to come nearer us while the bird stayed by us. No doubt *she* was a witch, and the bird was a good spirit."

I was curious to know how women became witches, if they went through any course of education or any ceremony, and I am told by more than one person that the following was the only rite necessary. When it is full moon and midnight the aspirant after unhallowed power goes alone to the seashore and lies down upon the beach *below the flood-tide mark*. She then puts her left hand under the soles of her feet and the right hand on the top of her head and repeats three times, "The muckle maister Deil tak what's atween dis twa haunds." The devil then appears and clenches the bargain with shaking of hands. When this is done there is no retracting. The woman is his slave, and he gives her power on land and sea.

The only safeguard against the malice of witches is to "flight wi' dem," that is, draw them into a controversy and scold them roundly; or, more effectual still, to scratch them "abune der breath." I am told of a man who did so to his cousin who was a witch, and who had bewitched his wife so as to make her lame. He succeeded in scratching the reputed witch on the forehead, and *drew blood*, which is the essential part of the proceeding, and his wife got better *for a time*, "though she deed o' the trouble no lang after." That man and that witch are still alive.

I asked an old woman, who was telling me many terrible tales of the witches, how it was that their power had decreased of late years, for certainly that of their master was not on the wane. And the good old dame answered with the simple faith of conviction,

"Weel, lamb, I just believe dat it's cause o' the Bible; for ye see, da evil pooers can dö naething when a wird o' Gospel, or ony güde, is heard and seen. Ye see it's just sae muckle güde aboot it keeps da evil doon."

There was a woman called Katherine Fordyce, and she died at the birth of her first child—at least, folks thought she died. A neighbour's wife dreamt shortly after Katherine's death that she came to her and said, "I have the milk of your cow that you could not get, but it shall be made up to you; you shall have more than that if you will give me what you will know about soon." The good wife would not promise, having no idea what Katherine meant, but shortly afterwards she understood that it was a child of her own to which Katherine referred. The child came, and the mother named it Katherine Fordyce; and after it was christened the Trow-bound Katherine appeared to the mother again and told her that all should prosper in her family while that child remained in it. She told her also that she was quite comfortable among the Trows, but could not get out unless somebody chanced to see her and had presence of mind to call on God's name at the moment. She said her friends had failed to *sain* her (guard by spells) at the time of her child's birth, and that was how she fell into the power of the Trows.

Prosperity came like a high tide upon the good wife's household until her child Katherine married. On the girl's wedding night a fearful storm came on; "the like had no' been minded in the time o' anybody alive." The Broch was overflowed by great seas, that

rolled over the skerries as if they had been beach-stones. The bride's father lost a number of his best sheep, for they were lifted by the waves and carried away, and "some folk did say that old men with long white beards were seen stretching their pale hands out of the surf and taking hold of the creatures." From that day the goodwife's fortunes changed for the worse. A man called John Nisbet saw that same Katherine Fordyce once. He was walking up a daal near her old home, when it seemed as if a hole opened in the side of the daal. He looked in and saw Katherine sitting in a "queer-shaped arm-chair, and she was nursing a baby." There was a bar of iron stretched in front to keep her a prisoner. She was dressed in a brown poplin gown—which folk knew by John's description to be her wedding-dress. He thought she said, "O Johnnie! what's sent de *here?*" And he answered, "And what keeps you *here?*" And she said, "Well; I am well and happy, but I can't get out, for *I have eaten their food!*" John Nisbet unfortunately did not know, or forgot to say, "Güde be aboot wis," and Katherine was unable to give him a hint, and in a moment the whole scene disappeared.

Once a girl in the peat-hill saw a little grey woman going wandering as if in search of something, and making a noise like scolding, only she used a "hidden tongue." All day she was seen going about the peat-banks, and the girls and boys employed there got frightened a little, feeling sure "she was no gude." At last, about sunset, one resolved to speak to the

woman, but it happened that the sun went down as the girl got near enough to address the Trow-wife. Then something drew the girl's attention another way for one moment, and when she looked again the creature had disappeared. "It is well known, you see, that if the sun rises while a Trow is above the grass, he or she has not the power to return home, and is day-bound, and must stay upon the earth in sight of man till sunset."

One Saturday night a boy was sleeping on a shake-down near the fireplace, as some unexpected guests had turned him out of his usual place of repose. Now the Trows require that every hearth shall be swept clean on Saturday night, that no one shall be found near it, and, above all, that plenty of clean water shall be in the house. Unfortunately, all those things had been neglected, so that when the Trows came, they were naturally much enraged, and made such a noise that the boy awoke. What should he see but two Trow-wives seating themselves not far from where he lay. One carried a baby, the loveliest little creature that ever was seen, only that it had three eyes instead of two—the extra one being in the middle of the forehead. The Trow who was not baby-encumbered sought for clean water, but, alas! found none, and she revenged herself by taking the first liquor she came across, which chanced to be a keg of *swatts* (*swatts* is the water which covers sowens, and is used to thin the sowens, or as a drink). Pouring some of the *swatts* into a basin, the Trows washed

their baby in it, and then the baby's clothes, and then poured the mess back into the keg, saying, "Tak ye dat for no' haein' clean water ae da hoose." They then sat down close by the fire, and hanging the baby's clothes on their feet, spread said feet out before the blazing peats, and dried the garments in that way.

Now the cute boy who was watching their proceedings knew that if he kept his eyes fixed upon them they could not go away. Accordingly, he kept staring and listening to their conversation, in hopes of hearing something worth remembering. But the Trow-wives began to fidget, being desirous of departing before sunrise, and at last one of them stuck the tongs in the fire and made them red-hot. As soon as the tongs became glowing she seized them, and approaching the boy, "pointed a blade at each ee," grinning herself at him in the most hideous manner, while she brought the hot tongs in alarming proximity to the wakeful urchin's face. Of course he blinked and screamed, and the Trows, taking advantage of the moment when his eyes were closed, fled.

Next morning, when the folk of the house went to take sowens from the keg for breakfast, there was nothing left but dirty water.

## CHAPTER IV.

I AM inclined to believe, from the various tales told of them, that there are Trows *and* Trows—that

one tribe differs as much from another as do the Negro and Saxon. Such a supposition may explain seemingly contradictory statements regarding this mysterious race of beings; and, indeed, I can find no other way of reconciling various legends regarding them; but all the authorities which I have consulted agree in saying that their language contains "neither curses nor blessings." They cannot be where either are used, so that we have an effectual means at hand of driving them from us when we so choose.

Mam Kirstan (so tradition saith) was fetched to a Trow's wife, and when she was there she saw them rolling up something to resemble a cow. She contrived to throw her bunch of keys into the heap without the Trows seeing her do so. When she got home she found her own cow dead, as her husband had omitted to "sain the byre." She told him to open the beast, and he would find her keys there. Accordingly he did so, which proved that the cow had been changed. When the Trows take anything they always leave some resemblance of the stolen property in its place.

On another occasion when Kirstan was among the Trows, she had to dress a baby, and one of the grey men brought a box of curious ointment, with which the child was to be anointed. While doing so Kirstan chanced to put up her hand to her eye, and left some of the Trow's ointment on it. From that time her sight became so keen that she could see a boat on the ocean twenty miles away, and could tell the position

and features of every man in it. But she had "taken the virtue from their ointment." So one day a Trowman met her on the hill, and says he, "Ye travel light and brisk for sae auld a wife." Never suspecting who he was, Kirstan answered, "It's my güde sight that helps me alang." "And which eye do you see best upon, güde wife?" asked the Trow. Kirstan told him readily enough, and he instantly put his little finger to the eye she had indicated, and she was blind on it ever after.

Mam Kirstan said that whenever she was "fetched" the Trows pressed her to eat, but she would not touch their food. They even marked a cross upon the butter they set before her, thinking to beguile her in that way, but nothing would tempt her to partake, knowing that if she did so she would be in their power, and they would be able to keep her as long as they liked.

At another time, when she was required professionally, the Trow who fetched her took her in his hands and muttered, "Safe there, safe back," and Kirstan found herself over the sea in another island. When matters were satisfactorily concluded in the Trow's domestic circle, he told her to follow him, and he brought her back the same way. Her husband never knew that she had been farther than her own kail-yard until he discovered that she was cold and weary, and her clothes damp from the sea spray. "Kirstan!" he exclaimed, "güde be aboot de! Whars do been?" Then her tongue was loosed, and she told her adventure.

The reason why Kirstan, and many a wise woman, went willingly on such expeditions was, that "if a person does what the Trows wish, everything prospers with that person. Only she and hers must be well *sained* about."

One fine morning very early a young fisherman got up to see how the sun rose, for by that he could tell if it was to be a day for the haaf, and he saw two grey-clad boys going along the road below the house. He thought they were beach-boys, and that they were off to their work early; but when they came benorth the house they left the road and went up to where a cow was lying on the grass. They walked up to the cow's face, then turned down again running, and the cow ran, following as far as her tether would allow. A neighbour coming to his door, also to see how the sun rose, saw the same boys and the cow, and it appeared to him that all three ran over the cliffs. And that same day the cow died, so it was evident the Trows took the real cow, and it was but a semblance of her that was left to die.

Two married brothers were living in one house, and the wife of the one was expecting to become a mother. Her brother-in-law, being informed of what was going on, took up a fishing-rod and set off to the Craigs (crag-fishing) *to be out of the way*. He had to pass a plantiecrü, the favourite haunt of many Trows, and when he got there he saw a number of them going as if towards his house. Jaimie instantly turned back, for he knew that they had power at such times, and the

*saining* might be neglected. Hurrying home he went and opened his trunk, took out a Bible, laid it near the door, and left the key in the lock. Making sure that no door or box was locked in the house (for that angers the Trows, and they have power when a key is turned), and exhorting the güde wives assembled not to allow their patient to go past the fireplace, Jaimie walked off, intending to visit a neighbour instead of venturing near the plantiecrü again. But by that time the Trows had got near, and found out that he had guarded the way to their coveted treasure, so they took all power from him as soon as he got a stone's throw from his own door. At that place he had to cross a stile, and when he had got one leg over the stile he found he could get no farther. There he sat without power to move; and he sat for hours astride the wall. By-and-by one of the güde wives came out, and seeing Jaimie sitting like that she cried out, "Jaimie! güde be about de. What's do sitting yonder for a' this time?" As soon as she said "güde be aboot de" the power to move came back, and Jaimie went home to share in the blythe-feast. But that very night a child of his took a crying. It cried and cried for exactly eight days, then it lay as if sleeping for eight days, and all folk said that it appeared to be another child. Then Jaimie knew it was a changeling, so he set the cradle outside the house-door, beyond the shadow of the lintel, and the changeling was no more. There was just an image left lifeless in the cradle, and many a time poor Jaimie

said, "That was what I got for saving my brother's wife frae the Trows."

One night a family having gone to bed heard a noise in their but-end-o'-the-hoose, and the woman peeped through a chink and saw a number of Trows at the fire nursing a sick one. She heard them say that their invalid was afflicted with jaundice, and they were pouring water on her out of a small wooden bowl (known in Shetland by the name of cap). As they poured the water they said, "This is the way to cure it." The woman instantly fixed her eyes upon the cap and called out, "Güde be aboot you," and the Trows instantly fled, leaving the cap, which was kept in that family and lent to people suffering from jaundice. Whether the woman had failed to gain all the needful information regarding the cure or not, certainly the use of the cap was not successful in all cases. But once a man (in another island) dreamt that if he went to a certain place among the cliffs he would there find a shell that would cure the jaundice, if he would use it as directed. He went to the place and found the shell, which he supposed to be a knee-cap. It was formed of bone, smooth inside. He was told to use it along with the Trow-cap, and the directions for use were as follows.

The patient must go out fasting—speechless—must utter no word—must go to a well flowing east. The person who accompanies the patient must carry the cap, inside of which must rest the shell. The cap must be dropped on the water and allowed to fill

itself as it gradually sinks. When full it must be lifted out and a little of the water poured into the shell. The patient then takes a sip from the shell; then the region of the heart and top of the head are sprinkled, and the remaining water in the shell is thrown over the patient's head upon the ground. This is repeated three times. No words must be spoken until the patient and attendant return to the dwelling. Then the person who officiated says, "I hae used the means—Lord put in the blessing," and the patient must reply, "Amen."

The cap and shell properly used never failed to effect a cure. Nurse says when she was a child she suffered from jaundice, and her father went and borrowed the Trow's cap and used it. He paid a shilling for it, and she was cured in a short time. Have hydropathists borrowed their system from Shetland Trows?

There is a fine spring well near Watlie, called Heljabrün, and the legend of it is this:—A wandering packman (of the Claud Halcro class) was murdered and flung into Heljabrün. Its water had always been known to possess healing power, and after becoming seasoned by the unfortunate pedlar's remains, the virtue in the water became even more efficacious. People came from far and near to procure the precious fluid. All who took it away had to throw three stones, or a piece of "white money," into the well, and the water never failed to cure disease.

There is—or was not long ago—in Yell, a little

brown jar, known by the name of "Farquar's pig," which contained a substance resembling lard mixed with tar. This ointment was used for hurts of any kind, and was never known to fail in curing those who applied it *in faith*. The curious thing about this "pig" was that the ointment never became less, notwithstanding the universal calls upon it, and its name has become as proverbial as that of the widow's cruse. It was taken from the Trows in the same way that the "cap" was captured! Property belonging to the Trows has frequently come into the possession of individuals, and always brings luck with it. Once a woman found a copper pan, which was identified by "them that ken the like" as a Trow's kettle; and while it remained in that woman's house she was very lucky.

Another woman walking through the daals of Widwick found a Trow's spoon. It was silver, beautifully carved and strangely shaped. Overjoyed, the finder put her prize in her pocket, but immediately a strange drowsiness began to oppress her, and sinking on the heather, she fell fast asleep. When she awoke the spoon was gone.

Whenever it was suspected that Trows were in the byre milking the cows, some one "tried to hear them doing it," because that brought luck to the byre; but if the listener attempted to look, woe betide that overcurious mortal!

When a child was not "thriving," and yet did not have the look that stamps the "Trow-stricken bairn,"

its mother went the round of her neighbours "to beg nine women's meat" for the ailing babe. Three kinds of eatables were given to her by nine mothers of healthy children, and with that food the little invalid was fed. This cure never failed, unless the child had fallen into the power of the Ferry-folk.

Nurse tells me that "a' folk keen dat da spirit canna rest till da body is buried or dissolved," and that if any wicked deed has been done by the deceased they will take the opportunity of unburdening themselves of the wrong done while they are wandering. But they do not have the power to address a living person unless that individual speaks first; or unless some incautious person has mentioned the ghost by his or her name when alive. In that case the wandering spirit will appear to the one who "called" it. One legend regarding this superstition will suffice.

There was a boat built at Haroldswick designed for the haaf-fishing, and her station was to be Burrafiord. Between those two places stretches the Bay of Norwick with its bold headlands, Clibberswick and Skau, and Saxafiord; and the haaf-boat when launched had to sail round that barbarous bit of coast before she could reach her station. Her intended crew met at Haroldswick, and launched the bonnie new boat for her trial-trip. "She took the water like a sealkie," and sailed merrily out of Haroldswick, while the men's wives made arrangements for walking across, with food and fishing-lines, to meet the boat at her station.

The boat went safely on her way till she rounded

Skau, when she was met by another boat, whose skipper called out, "Lads, what are you going to do?" The answer was, "We are lying by for bait, then we have to run in for the bread and lines; after that we will be fram (voyaging far), and may be as soon as you." The other boat went out to sea, but ran short of bait, so returned. But when they reached the place where they had spoken their comrades, they found the pieces of the boat, with her oars and mast, lying strewn about the sea. When they came to the fishing station they found the wives of the lost men waiting, and were asked if they had "seen aught o' the new boat." Then they knew that the crew must have perished, and the skipper said, "Gang hame, jewels; gane hame ta your bairns; your lads 'll come when they can, pür fellows!"

The same day a woman chanced to be near the place where the boat had been launched, and there she saw a bit of white wood floating in the surf. She picked it up and found it was the *hassen* (board adjoining the keel, to which the *binders* of a boat are attached) of the lost boat, and on this hassen lay the skipper's snuff-horn. "There was no more of it but sorrow till some days later, when some people saw the six men who had been in the boat at the south end of the island, near a well-known Trow-haunt. They looked just as they had been in life, only for *the kind o' something* in their faces that was no' just earthly atagether. And often after that they were seen—always the six of them—walking with their faces aye

turned to the sea. Sometimes they appeared in the daytime and sometimes at night, but no one had courage to speak to them until a sensible woman did so. They were passing near her own house-door, and she exclaimed, 'Oh! what is this?' Then she called the skipper by his name, and he spoke, but his voice was like a clap of thunder, and she could not understand him. She said, 'Moderate your speech, for I'm no' fit to stand it.' Then the man spoke quite naturally, and the first he said was, 'What is it that goes before the face of the Almighty?' And she replied,—

> 'Justice and judgment of Thy throne
> Are made the dwelling-place:
> Mercy, accompany'd with truth,
> Shall go before Thy face.'

After that the man conversed just as if he had been alive, and he told her that when their boat came off the mouth o' the fiord, Madge Coutts (a witch who disliked them) came into the boat and seated herself on the thwart, and they knew by her look that she had 'designed for their lives.' They hoped to get rid of her by striking her with their huggie-staff (large fish-clip), and actually succeeded in turning her over the gunwale, but in a moment she dived under the boat, and got in on the other side in the form of a large black ox. Putting down her horns, she struck them into the boat and drew out the *hassen*, and then the boat, of course, went to pieces. The skipper said he could not rest because of some transaction not quite honest between himself and a brother, and he begged the woman to set

it right, that the brother might have his own. She did so, and the six men were seen no more. It was remembered that upon the day of the accident Madge Coutts was seen going in at her own chimney in the form of a grey cat, and that immediately afterwards a sulphur-tainted smoke was seen ascending."

## CHAPTER V.

I WAS told once of a witch who had taught her daughter some "tricks of the trade," and the girl, proud of her knowledge, changed herself into a raven, according to the maternal directions. But in learning how to become a bird, the girl had forgotten to receive the instructions necessary for returning to mortal mould, and would have remained a raven if her mother had not guessed somehow the state of the case. With great difficulty the witch contrived to restore her daughter's personal appearance, but not all her art could bring back the girl's natural voice. Croak she would, and croak she did, and all her descendants after her; and that was how the peculiar sound (called *corbieing* * in Shetland) known as "a burr" came.

Another witch, desirous of injuring a neighbour, changed herself into a black dog, and made her way into the neighbour's ben-end-o'-the-hoose, where she would certainly have created serious disturbance if an old man in the family had not recognised her by a peculiar formation of the eyelids, which, it seems, she

* A *corbie* is a raven.

could not discard from her canine appearance. Seizing the tongs, the worthy patriarch brought them down upon the black dog's back with might and main. "Tak doo yon, Minnie Merran" (the witch's name), he cried, "an bear doo da weight o' dis auld airm as lang as doo leeves."

The dog ran howling and limping out of the house, and when next the witch was seen, she who hitherto had walked upright and with the dignity of a Norna, leant upon a stick, and had a hump upon her back. She said she had fallen from a height, and was afraid her spine was broken; but folk called it "the mark o' auld Jockie's taings."

Notwithstanding the proud boast which Shetlanders make of having sprung from the fair-haired Norsemen, there is a tradition of a race existing in the islands before the sea-kings made their appearance there. "The first folks that ever were in our isles were the Picts, and they were said to come from a place in France called Picardy" (!). "They had quarrelled there among themselves, and some fled *by Scotland*, and some *spoored up* as far north as Wick. They had no ships, only small boats, and they resolved to go on from shore to shore, till they got to the end of all land. When they reached the north of Shetland they said, 'Yit-land, yit-land,' meaning outermost, or last land, and that was the way the isles came to be called Shetland. These Picts were not a seafaring folk at all. They were very small, but strong and ingenious. They were very peaceable, kindly folk, but lazy. They

built brochs, which were always made so that one flat stone covered the top, and no one can tell how far down in the earth the lower rooms went; for the Picts, after finishing the tops of their habitations, continued to add vaults and cells and passages innumerable underneath the ground. They never provided more food than what was required for the day's wants, and after supper they always said—

'He that was in Bethlehem born
Will provide for us the morn.'

They brewed a kind of spirit from the heather flowers, and this spirit was so much liked that many nations tried to make it, but the Picts kept the secret of 'how to do it' to themselves. By-and-by the Norsemen came unexpectedly and killed all the peace-loving Picts except one man and his son. They were spared, that the conquerors might be instructed in the art of brewing spirits from heather tops. At first both the Picts refused to tell, but after torture was applied, the father said, 'Kill the lad, and then I'll tell you.' The sea-kings did as the father desired. 'Now,' said he, triumphantly, 'you can kill me, slow or fast; it is all one. You shall never learn the secrets of our race from the last of the Picts. My son might have been tempted to reveal them, but there is no fear of that now:—

'Kill slow or kill fast,
Death man come at last.'

And that was the end of the Picts in Shetland."

There is a piece of ground at Burrafiord (and another near Norwick) known by that name, which means "field of the dead." The ground is uncultivated, and the tradition is that no one must put spade in it, or misfortune will certainly befall that individual. Once a woman dared the old belief, and dug up a portion of the death-rig. Shortly afterwards her best cow died. Nothing daunted, the rash dame delved next year, and actually sowed corn on the spot. "Then her husband died, and after that she let the rig alane."

The supposition is that the death-rigs are battle-fields.

Swinaness is also considered too sacred to "put spede intil," for there the sea-kings were wont to contend, and many bloody battles were fought there. A man chanced to delve a small bit of verdant turf in Swinaness, wherein he sowed corn in hopes of reaping a rich harvest; but horrors! when the corn grew up it was found that the stalks were filled with blood, and the ears dropped salt tears in the place of tender dew.

Another tradition tells the misadventure of an unfortunate giant:—"Sigger-hill is benorth Colvie-dell, and on the slope there is a large flat stone eight or ten feet square. There was a giant who lived in that neighbourhood called Sigger, and he put a rock in the sea for a craig-seat—that is, a seat where he could place himself conveniently for fishing. But the water was deep, and the giant

did not like wetting his feet, so he thought he would place a stepping-stone between the shore and Scarvaskerry. He went up the hill, and found a large flat stone suitable for his purpose, but as he was returning staggering under the weight of the enormous stone, his wife (the guy-kerl) came out, and seeing him so burdened, exclaimed—

'Oh, Siggie, Siggie,
Mony an evil stane
Has lain on dy riggie!' (backbone).

With that the giant tripped and fell, and the stone on top of him—and he died there; and there he had to lie, for no one was able to take that stone off him."

Saxie and Herman were two other Unst giants—Saxie holding as his special territory the hilly promontory of Saxafiord on the east side, and Herman that of Hermaness on the west side, of Burrafiord, the geological formation of their respective domains being totally different. They seem to have quarrelled perpetually, and many stories of those quarrels are told. The most noteworthy incident seems to have been the occasion when, using the rocks for weapons, they contrived to leave a record of their exploits which will last for all time. A huge boulder which Saxie flung rises to the surface of the water close to the shore on the Hermaness side of the fiord, and is called "Saxie's Baa;" and the rock which Herman hurled at his foe is bedded in the cliffs of Saxafiord "in the heart of alien metal," and goes by the name of "Herman's Hellyac." Saxie's Kettle is a basin in

the rock, into which the water rises from below, bubbling and hissing as if it were boiling. Once Herman asked the loan of this kettle in which to boil an ox, and Saxie said he would lend it only on condition that they should go halves. Says Herman,

| | |
|---|---|
| "I'll radder reeve rüt | "I'll rather tear and eat it raw |
| As gie da half o üt." | Than give the half away." |

A pitched battle was the consequence of Herman's poetical refusal to pay for the loan of Saxie's kettle, but history saith not who got the best of it.

Every year, at Yule-time, a house was *troubled*, and no person could stay in it. At last a bold-hearted fisherman undertook to break the power of evil by remaining in the house during its afflicted period. He sat down in one of the rooms, and lighting a candle, began to read the Bible. Suddenly he heard a noise, as if dead meat were being dropped along the passage. Seizing his Bible in one hand and an axe in the other, he rushed to meet the supernatural foe. "*It* went out at the door; he followed. It took the road to the cliffs; he followed hard after. *It* quickened its speed; he did the same. Just as it was going to jump into the sea from the high cliff, he said a holy word, and slung his axe, which stuck fast in it. Hasting home, the man persuaded some friends to accompany him to the spot. There it was, with the axe sticking in it. The men covered it with earth, and dug a trench around it, so that neither beast nor body could go near it."

"But what was it like?"

"The men called it a sea-devil, and all the description they could ever give of it was, that it resembled a large lump of grey *slub*" (jelly-fish sort of stuff).

"Had it a face?"

"No; it had no form at all."

"How could it walk? It must have had *legs*, at least."

"No; it had no legs nor wings, but it kept the man running, and run what he could, he could not go so fast as it."

"What *could* it be?"

"That no human can tell. The men never could tell what it was like, but they called it a sea-devil, and they said it was the same thing which came up at the Haaf one day, and told the fishers that they must never go to sea on the fourth day of Yule, else evil would betide them."

The Norsemen understood the language of ravens, and many strange secrets were revealed through the bird of the air telling the matter. If two ravens are seen "contending as they fly," one will turn round on its back and cry, "Corp! corp!" and the beholder knows that some one he loves will die soon!

Sea-gulls watch over fishermen and foretell their end —if you can understand their language!

Mice could be banished from the corn-yards by using a charm, which those who knew kept to themselves!

It is lucky to catch a turbot, and luck will follow the fishermen who do so if they attend to what a turbot once said:—

"Wash me clean and boil me weel,
Pick me banes *but dinna burn them.*"

Mermaids are called sealkie-wives, and their seal-lovers are supposed to be fallen angels in metempsychosis. A mermaid had the ill luck once to be caught on a hook and dragged into a boat. She begged for liberty, and promised, if the men let her go, that any wish they chose should be granted. The skipper thereupon dropped Miss Mermaid over the gunwale, and as she dived to her home she sang gleefully:—

"Muckle gude I wid you gie,
And mair I wid ye wish,
There's muckle evil in the sea,
Scoom weel your fish."

"Cheated, and by a mermaid!" cried the skipper, and only one of the six men belonging to the boat took any notice of the sea-maiden's injunction. But one *did* scoom (skim) weel his fish, and lo! a splendid pearl was found among the scoomings.

I will conclude my fragments of our folk-lore with the legend of how women were promoted to the place of honour—namely, the head of the table. A Danish rover, followed by a large number of fierce attendants, made a descent upon Unst at a time when the greater number of the "fighting men" were from home. Those left were chained and compelled to act as slaves, while, hardest of all, the conqueror and his followers took possession of the Shetlanders' homes and wives. But the women did not tamely submit to such a state of affairs. They concocted a plan,

*and kept the secret* till all was fully matured. Then, one night, at a preconcerted signal, they simultaneously murdered the sleeping Danes, and freed their lawful but enslaved husbands. As a reward for this action, and to commemorate the occasion when women had kept a secret, the wife was henceforth to occupy the honoured post at the "top of the board."

What a change has come over the old place since the time of which I have remembrance. The last few years have overturned everything in the islands, and the only comfort left is the thought that not even long-headed Aberdonians can stamp the traces of a ruthless hand upon the Norland seas, or give the rocks of Fatherland notice to quit!

Civilisation has got up to Shetland at last. The telegraph wires have found their way even there, and every two or three days a first-class passenger steamboat leaves Granton *en route* for the islands.

## *MY DOG, SLOP.*

Slop was a collie. There was nothing remarkable about his appearance. He was a handsome animal certainly, but I have seen handsomer. He was simply a purely-bred, good-sized, well-formed black and tan shepherd dog. But although I have had a long and extensive acquaintance with dogs of various breeds, it has never been my fortune to know one that could match Slop in keenness and breadth of sagacity and in versatility of acquirements. He became my property when we were both very young—he a fat unshapely little pup, just able to lick milk on his own account, I a boy of fourteen. I was proud of Slop, and soon got to be very fond of him; and he speedily attached himself to me, and acknowledged me as his sole master. We were inseparable; he followed me everywhere like my shadow; and we soon came thoroughly to understand each other. I have always been excessively fond of boating, fishing, and shooting; and in the Shetland archipelago, I had ample scope and freedom to indulge in such pastimes.

Slop was a present from my father. I began his education almost immediately; and he soon showed

himself endowed with rare intelligence. He speedily became as fond of sport as his master. I had him under thorough command; and in a very short time he came to understand and obey my slightest wish. To please me was evidently his greatest pleasure; to win my approval and caress, his greatest ambition; and to live with me and for me, he seemed to regard as the final cause of his existence. I encouraged him to swim, and no spaniel was ever a better water-dog. He was pointer, retriever, friend, and companion all in one. Once I had winged a duck of a rare species flying over a small loch. Slop plunged in in pursuit; but as often as he was about to seize the prey, the duck dived. Time after time, this was repeated. My last percussion-cap was expended, and I was therefore terribly mortified at my helplessness. Nothing for it but to trudge home several miles for a fresh supply; so ordering Slop ashore, I left him in charge of my gun and shot-bag till my return. I knew he would not leave the gun; and I was pretty sure the duck would not dare to leave the protection of the water while the dog was so near.

On my way, it occurred to me how much more convenient it would have been if I could have sent Slop home for the caps. It might often be useful to be able to send him home with a message; and I forthwith resolved to add another accomplishment to the many he had already acquired. I began with short distances—only a few hundred yards—ordering him to go "home, home" (repeating the word "home").

In a short time he perfectly understood my meaning; and after a little, I was wont to send him many miles home with some indifferent message, written on a piece of paper and tied to his collar, just for practice; but occasionally I found it a most useful acquirement. Those at home were instructed to be sure, when he appeared with my message, to pet and praise him, and send him back with a reply of some sort, a note or small parcel, and instruct him to go to his "master." I was amazed and delighted at his quickness of comprehension and readiness to obey. Teaching him was the easiest thing in the world. My order, conveyed in the invariable stereotyped formula, "Home, Slop, home, quick!" in a very short time came to be instantly and cheerfully obeyed; and the return order, "To your master, Slop," with at least equal alacrity. I little thought that a day would come when I should owe my life to Slop's faithfulness as my messenger.

"Our house, as I formerly stated, but may here repeat, was situated near the head of the bay of Balta-sound. Across the opening of the bay eastward, stretched the small narrow uninhabited island of Balta. Barely half a mile separated the two islands at the nearest points. One fine autumn day I embarked in my little pleasure-boat, and sailed down the bay to Balta to shoot rabbits, Slop my only companion. Near the extreme point of Balta, and just before landing, I caught sight of a Great Northern Diver swimming along-shore. It had never been my good fortune to

shoot one of these magnificent birds, and I was anxious to secure a specimen; so I at once gave chase. It is useless to fire at any of the divers, when swimming, unless they are very near, for they are certain to 'dive on the fire,' as the phrase goes; it is a trick they all have. This particular bird was an old and wary fellow, and for a long time I could not get within range. He would appear for an instant just a few yards too far off, and then dive, while I continued the pursuit in the same direction. I was in this way beguiled a considerable distance round the seaward coast of Balta, which is formed of steep precipices, detached rocks or stacks, skerries, and sunken rocks. At last I got a fair chance, and, to my great joy, bagged the Diver.

"As by this time I was fully half-way round Balta, and the light wind, which was off shore, was slightly on the quarter, and the sea perfectly smooth, I kept sailing on with the intention of circumnavigating the island. Gliding smoothly and silently along, and just as I was passing a small rock called Skarta Skerry, I caught sight of an otter on its top busily engaged in discussing his dinner. He was within easy range; and to snatch my fowling-piece and give him the contents of the right barrel, was the work of an instant. He was wounded, but not killed, so I gave him the *coup de grâce* from the second barrel. Luffing up, I ran my boat along the Skerry. Seizing the diminutive kedge attached to the end of the long rope which served as a painter, I sprang on shore,

giving the skiff a little shove off, to prevent her rubbing against the sharp and limpet-covered rock. With sails flapping in the light breeze, she fell off to leeward. I fixed the kedge in a little crevice; but turning to see that the boat was swinging clear and safe, to my horror I observed the other end of the rope running over the bows and dropping into the sea. In some way never accounted for, but most probably by some idle meddling hand, it had been unloosed from the ring-bolt, and in my hurry and excitement I had not observed it. My boat was adrift and I was a prisoner! In an instant I knew and felt the peril of the situation. It was low-water at the time; but the tide had already turned, the flood was coming in, and at high-water the low-lying rocks of Skarta Skerry, I was well aware, would be covered some feet. Had I been a good swimmer, I should doubtless instantly have stripped, and swum to and regained my boat, or at anyrate could easily enough have reached the shore; but unfortunately, at that time I could not swim at all. The Skarta Skerry was barely fifty yards from a steep smooth precipice of several hundred feet in height, and the nearest landing-place in a little creek where the shore was sloping, was at least a hundred and fifty yards distant. To me, in the circumstances, this was an impassable gulf.

"I sat down, and tried to think. For a few terrible moments, no hope of rescue or means of escape presented itself to my mind. I daresay some audible expressions of despair burst from me, for I was roused

by Slop laying his paw on my knee and looking up wistfully in my face, as if to inquire what was wrong. 'Ah! Slop,' I cried, '*you* can reach the shore, and are safe enough; but your master will perish miserably. What will they think at home?' His quick ear caught the word *home*, and he was instantly on the alert, as if for orders, and even ran to the water's edge with an eager whine, which expressed as plainly as words could have done: 'Send me.' In my first excitement, I had not thought of this before; and even now, when there really seemed a gleam of hope in it, the thought of parting from my companion and being left alone on that terrible rock, was dreadful. But what else was there that could be done? 'You are right, Slop,' I said, 'It is my only chance, and you shall go.' I tore a leaf from my pocket-book, and wrote: 'I am on the Skarta Skerry, boat adrift. Send help instantly, or it will be too late.' Hastily, but securely, I wrapped my missive in my handkerchief, which I tied firmly to Slop's collar, all the time saying to the intelligent creature: 'You must go *home* with this, Slop, *home*. Now, Slop, will you be sure to take my message *home* and *quick*?' He was already at the water's edge. 'Come here, Slop,' I cried. He rushed back to my arms. For an instant I hesitated, and tried to think. 'Yes,' I said; 'it must be so; it is my only chance. Slop, Slop, your master is in sore straits; his life depends upon you. Brave dog, good dog! Now, *home*, Slop—*home* and *quick!*'

"Two bounds, an impatient bark, as though he meant

to assure me he knew it was a case of life and death, a plunge, and Slop was cleaving the water towards the nearest shore. I sat still and silent on my dismal perch, and watched his rapid progress. I saw him approach and gain the rocky shore. I saw him shake himself hastily. I saw him scramble up amongst the boulders, up the sloping path at the head of the creek, and reach the brow of the cliff. For an instant I saw him clear against the sky, and then he disappeared. He had never paused, or looked back. And now I felt indeed alone and miserable beyond description. A depression of spirit weighed me down. It happened long ago, and yet, I well remember my thoughts and feelings and fancies as though it had been yesterday. They were too deep and intense to be other than graven on memory as with a pen of iron.

"Scarcely had Slop passed beyond recall, when it occurred to me that it might have been a better plan to have tied a strand of twine to his collar and my own wrist and made him tow me on shore. He could have done it; and I might have reached the rocks alive. Why did I not think of this sooner! But it was too late now; and I feared I should certainly perish miserably. Then I wished the end were come. When it did come it would only be a brief struggle. But to be doomed to sit there and think, and watch the rising tide for two or three long hours, hope and despair alternately possessing me—it would drive me mad, I said to myself. But I resolutely thrust from me the ghastly picture which fancy conjured up, and tried, as

calmly as I was able, to calculate the chances for and against a rescue.

"Everything depended upon Slop. On all previous occasions, when I had sent him home with messages, he had only at most a few miles of hill or moor to traverse. But now he had to cross Balta, then cross the sound—nearly half a mile in width, as I have said—and still he was two miles from home. I knew there were many things that might distract, deter, or detain him; and a very short detention would be certain death to me. Suppose he started a rabbit on the way, might he not forget his errand, and pursue? Then another terrible fear took possession of me. Slop always rolled and rubbed himself on the grass when he came out of the water. What if my handkerchief got detached, and was lost? What if my pencil-scrawl, soaked with water, became unreadable? But even should none of these things happen, would Slop be noticed as soon as he reached home? It would need to be *as soon*. Men, I knew, could not be got at a moment's notice; they must be sent for from some little distance; and after manning the nearest and handiest boat, fully four miles of sea must be traversed ere help could reach me. And there was now left but the slenderest margin for possible delay. The flood-tide had been running for an hour. In three hours at most, the Skerry would be covered. What should I do? I well remember the lines kept recurring to me again and again:

'Amid his senses' giddy wheel,
Did he not desperate impulse feel,
Headlong to plunge himself below,
And meet the worst his fears foreshow?'

"It was not a dream with me, but a terrible reality, and the 'desperate impulse' became well-nigh overmastering. I fought against it with all the strength I could command. Would it not be cowardice? Would it not be suicide? I would not listen to the temptation; I would not think of it, not while there was a gleam of hope, not while reason remained, not at least till the water had risen to my feet. I was no coward. I had often been in positions of utmost peril, when coolness of head, readiness of resource, or promptitude of action, had carried me through; and I rather prided myself on my presence of mind in circumstances of difficulty or danger. I had once been driven far out to sea in a storm. On another occasion, my boat had been swamped. I had lost my way in a snow-storm. I had once been compelled to spend thirty-six long hours of tempest and snow and sleet in the dead of winter on an uninhabited island, when no boat could possibly come with help. But in these and other cases of emergency, I had never lost coolness or courage or hope, for there was always something to *do*, something that *could* be done. There was the need and the demand for action of some sort. But here it was very different. Sitting on this terrible rock, perforce so utterly passive and powerless, with nothing that I could do, and little of promise to hope

for—the thought and suspense and anticipation were torturing.

"I well remember the horrible fascination of watching the water rising inch by inch, creeping, with a cruel, slow persistency, higher and higher every moment. I remember thinking of the Martyr maiden—

'Margaret, virgin daughter of the Ocean wave'—

bound to a stake, and left to perish by the flowing tide. This and other dismal pictures of the imagination would, spite of all my efforts, force themselves upon my mind. It was the very Valley of the Shadow of Death through which I was passing! Then thoughts and memories of another kind—of the home and friends I should never see more—thoughts too of a more solemn kind, bearing upon the future which comes after death—reflections, retrospections, regrets, hopes, prayers, came thick and fast. Anon my reverie was interrupted. As I sat there, silent and motionless as the rock itself, a cormorant rose from beneath the water close by, and made for the Skerry, with the evident intention of coming to rest upon it. Catching sight of me when only a few feet off, he instantly dived with a splash. How I envied him! *He* was at home in the water; and I—oh, fool, fool, to have neglected the art of swimming!

"Thus two and a half long hours slipped past; long they seemed—almost a lifetime—and yet all too short. The tide was rapidly rising. Only a small space of the topmost point of the rock now remained above

water, and still there were no indications of rescue. Not a sound was to be heard but the ripple and plash of the water, or the wild scream of the sea-gulls overhead. If all had gone well with Slop, and he had been expeditious, it was fully time—it was something more than time—that succour should have come. He had not returned to me, which I was sure he would have done if he had not carried my message home. That was now the only slender thread to which fast-fading hope still clung. And thus another miserable, torturing half-hour passed; and now the water was washing my very feet, and scarce enough rock for a cormorant to perch on was left uncovered. I sprang to my feet with a despairing groan. I looked at the cruel sea, the black frowning rocks, the bright sun, and blue sky. 'Oh horrible! Will no help come? Must I thus miserably die? so young and strong too! Ah, Slop! you have failed me in my need!'

"But Slop had not failed me. Standing there with strained senses and bursting breast, just then, I seemed to hear a sound different from the monotonous plash, plash of the waters around me. Was it the sound of oars, or was it only fancy? I held my breath and listened. Again that sound! Joy, joy! I knew it well—the stroke of oars, regular but more rapid than usual—quick, quick like those who pulled for very life, as indeed they did. Loudly, wildly, half mad, I shouted my welcome. Another minute, and round the point, scarcely fifty yards from my perch, swept a light four-oared boat, urged on to utmost speed by four

stalwart fellows, who knew too well the need there was for it all, and bent to their work with a will; while high in the bow, like a figure-head, with paws on the gunwale, ears erect, and trembling all over with excitement, the first sight that caught my eye was my noble, faithful Slop! I had done him injustice when, for a moment, I thought he had failed me; and my heart smote me. The instant he saw me, he sprang with a joyful bark far ahead, and swam to me. I took him in my arms all dripping as he was. I was saved, and to him I owed my life! Not his the cause of the delay which had so nearly made the rescue come too late. He had carried my message safely and swiftly home. But notwithstanding that all haste was made, it took a considerable time before a crew of men could be collected.

"My darling Slop lived to a good old age. He has long passed away to the 'happy hunting-grounds.' Since those days of my youth, he has had several successors, but never one to equal him in intelligence and fidelity, never one I loved so well, and never one that so well deserved to be loved and cherished.

"I shall only add that, after that day's terrible experience, I lost no time in putting it beyond possibility that I should ever again encounter a like mishap, for I soon became an expert swimmer, and found myself as much at home in the water as Slop did."

# *PRINCE MORDGE: A TRUE BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.*

## CHAPTER I.

I CANNOT tell you how our dear old dog came by the title of Prince Mordge. Our father was in the habit of conferring names upon every individual of his acquaintance, and those names were always significant of some peculiarity, attribute, or "weakness" in the person designated. Although derivation of many such titles was often obscure enough, yet we generally understood and appreciated their significance; but regarding dog Slop's title I (at least) knew nothing more than it conferred a certain dignity upon him, which showed itself in his gait and the slow elevating of tail and nose when he was addressed as Prince Mordge.

His true name and familiar appellation, however, was Slop; only his master or our father, during friendly conversation, addressed him as Mordie. I conjecture that he must have been perhaps three or four years my junior. I distinctly recollect his home-coming. He was then a small pup, and his welcome was uproarious.

Of his education I can only speak traditionally. I never remember him anything but a well mannered, talented dog of dignified demeanour. He belonged to our eldest brother, whose familiar home-*sobriquet* was Yetta, who had a rare talent for educating the lower animals. He treated them with uniform kindness. He believed their moral sense to be very like our own. He said that his dog could appreciate justice, truth, honour, unselfishness as well as a man could; and in educating Slop he acted on that belief by always appealing to the dog's moral sense before resorting to corporal punishment. Slop was never corrected when his master was angry, nor promised a reward without receiving it, nor ever cheated in any way.

A naturalist anxious to secure a fine specimen, would have been highly aggravated to have the bird he had shot so neatly carried to his feet a mangled bunch of feathers. Slop's joyous bark and wagging tail showed indeed that he felt he had deserved credit for bringing the bird at all, but it took many lessons to teach him that he must bring it without ruffling a feather. Kindness and patience succeeded before long in making Slop invaluable as a retriever and pointer, although he was only a Scotch collie. He was never a very playful dog, I believe, but seemed from his earliest hours to have looked on life from its serious points of view. He was characterised by that gravity of deportment which usually accompanies a fine sense of what is due to one's self. We children seldom ventured to take

liberties with his tail or ears. Naturally his temper was not amiable, but he had it so completely under control that even when a baby buried its fists in the tenderest parts of his furry coat, or when a servant trod upon his toes, he was never known to do more than remonstrate by a howl, or an exhibition of his ivory. Self-control was the leading feature of his young master's character, and Slop had not been our brother's intimate associate without benefiting by his example. So completely did he idolise that friend and master, that no one else got any notice from Slop when his idol was by. But his master was away from home for a great part of each year, and in his absence Slop consoled himself after a fashion with the family in general. He knew days before his master left that he meant to go, and would mope over the impending calamity with resigned pathetic sorrow. Whether his mind could comprehend that beyond the period of separation lay the prospect of reunion I cannot tell. His master evidently believed that Slop *could* be comforted by such a thought, for when he "crept to knee" and looked sadly, tenderly, beseechingly in the loved face, Yetta would stroke the brown head and say, "Never mind, Mordie, good dog; I'll be back next spring;" and the eye would brighten and the expressive tail would beat a response upon the carpet.

But when our brother was gone, oh! the sorrowful hours Slop spent under the big arm-chair in the corner! Had he exhibited temper or sulks we would not have minded, but his submissive grief was most

affecting, and all the family vied with each other in petting and striving to comfort him. He would creep out when called and eat what was given—not because he cared to eat, but because he wished us to see that he appreciated our attentions.

If food were set before him, and no coaxing added, he left it untouched, and I believe would have pined to death if our father had not persuaded him to take an occasional walk, and striven continually to make him forget his grief. I have come into the parlour and seen Slop with his head on my father's knee, and this would be the sort of conversation between them.

"Yetta is awa', Mordge. Poor Mordge!"

Slop sighed sentimentally.

"Would the dog like to be after the rabbits with his master?"

Slop's cocked ears said, "Wouldn't I just!"

"Where's the gun, Mordge? eh, Mordie?"

Slop replied by glancing at the row of guns slung upon the wall, and uttering a low whine. Then our father would go through the pantomime of pointing and firing a gun, and Slop would bark joyously. Having roused his interest, our father would then invite him to take a walk, and thus he became gradually weaned from his sorrow. But there was no forgetfulness in his brighter moods. If his master's name was mentioned in his hearing he sprang up and gazed with eager questioning at whoever had uttered the name.

Once when a parcel was being unfolded an im-

patient hand pulled out some worn clothes, which had belonged to Yetta, and tossed them on the floor. We had not known that Slop was in the room until he was seen to spring upon the garments with a passionate cry of recognition. I need scarcely say that he was allowed to keep a bit of the dress, which he dragged to his corner and almost fondled as he curled himself down upon it.

As he had known before his master went away what would happen, so before his return some mysterious sense told Slop that our brother was coming back again. He would become quite restless and excited, and often utter a yelp of pleasure. Then was the children's chance, for at such times Slop seldom failed to meet our wishes regarding a game—a regular dog and bairn game which he knew how to conduct for our pleasure, yet without losing his dignity or authority.

I do not recollect Slop ever coming to us, as so many jolly dogs do, and saying, "Come, children, let's have some fun." No! Prince Mordge never did that, but whenever his master said, "Slop, go and play with the bairns," he came out at once and entered into our amusements quite cheerfully. Or if (his master being far away) we coaxed him with all our might, he would, as I said, join in our sports with a condescension which we fully appreciated.

The manner in which we paid court to Prince Mordge, flattering and palavering to win his favours, would have earned for us high places in an Eastern Court.

## CHAPTER II.

A GAME we were fond of playing was this. A bit of stick or stone was chosen, lots cast to determine who was to carry it first, and (that point settled) the individual so distinguished was allowed a fair start, and then whoever could catch him won a point. It was of course considered a triumph to be the first who laid hands on the "game," and whoever did so took his place. If the pursued was clever at doubling and dodging, he could give us a long chase up and down, round and round the prescribed bounds.

Slop seldom refused to join in this game, when judiciously requested to assist. He might easily have run down the swiftest of us, but he never did until he considered the "run" had passed reasonable bounds.

Then he would run up and catch the "game."

As soon as he did so there would be a shout of, "Now, Slop, it is your turn;" and Slop would take the stick and make off as the others had done.

Such rare runs as *he* gave us! Letting us come so near that our hands were almost on him, then with a quick bound leaving us far behind.

Sometimes he would trot slowly ahead, so that we felt sure he was tired, and to be easily caught; but when we had almost encircled him, and were excitedly calling to each other that he could not escape, Slop would slip through us like an eel.

Once when he was beset on every hand he took a

flying leap over our wee brother's head. We all screamed out, "That's not fair. No! Slop! that's not fair."

He stood still and looked from one to the other inquiringly, and still we yelled, "That's not fair." After a brief considering of the subject, Slop evidently came to the conclusion that we were justified in protesting against his bringing canine agility into the field against our inferior human capabilities. He stood quiet and permitted himself to be caught at once; and I do not remember that he ever "came the dog" over us in that fashion again.

Another favourite game was hiding some small object from one of our number who had to find it or pay a forfeit. The one who had to "seek" was blindfolded by some of us, while others crept away with the article to be found.

This game Slop joined in with more personal enjoyment than in the other. He stood when his turn came, and permitted us to blindfold him.

We generally put the article under a stone or among the long grass at the foot of a tree.

When it was carefully deposited Slop was liberated and "Seek! Seek!" was shouted.

Away he would go, round and round, sometimes quite near the object of the search, when our excitement would become intense; and from that circumstance alone an ordinary dog would have been led to discover the hidden prize, and would have "spotted" it at once. But Slop was too clever to take advantage of

our indiscretion. He would sniff about the spot very busily while we shouted; then when we believed that the secret was out he would run off to the other end of the lawn, and hunt about there in the same way, which afforded us immense amusement.

We were too young to see that all was make-believe on Slop's part. He knew exactly where the article had been deposited, and could have found it at once, but he knew that would be giving us no fun: so he continued to amuse us in his own fashion. Where was reason lacking there?—or, rather, what was the difference between Slop's instinct and our reason?

Remarkable instances of retrieving were frequent in our dear friend's history.

Our baby's shoe was lost some miles from home. The child had been carried by its mother on a pony, so that there were no friendly footsteps to follow, when Slop having been shown the other shoe and told to "go seek," started on the spoor.

He was absent for some time, but eventually returned bearing the lost shoe covered with mud.

On another occasion the cape of a riding-dress was dropped in the same way, but at a much greater distance. After a long absence Slop brought home the missing garment, and received the praise he merited with a modest consciousness of his deserts which was most impressive.

## CHAPTER III.

SOMETIMES, when returning for his annual visit, our brother landed at a part of the island six miles from home. Slop always accompanied any one who had gone to meet the traveller, and if he was detained by the way he would send his dog home with his walking-stick as a mute token that he had landed, and would arrive before long. With what joyful haste would Slop bound to our feet and drop the stick there, assured of sympathy and approbation!

As I said before, Slop seldom joined us in our walks or play unless coaxed or commanded to do so. But a time came when all that was altered. My sister and I were loitering along the road to school one morning when we met Yetta returning with dog and gun from snipe shooting. Bella, who was our brother's favourite, and could take liberties, asked him to come a bit of the way with us; and to second her request, enlarged pathetically upon the fear we had of encountering "John Thomason's biting grice" (a pig addicted to biting). That terrible creature was usually prowling about a part of the road which we had to traverse, and the pig was at that time doubly formidable, being followed by a litter of young pigs.

"I am too tired to-day," said Yetta, "but Slop will go. Slop, go and take care of the bairns!"

Prince Mordge had often been sent on a like mission, but it was hard to leave master, gun, and

gamebag. However, his master's word was law to Slop, so hanging his head and tail, he turned submissively after us.

"Slop is sulking," I remarked, after a time, "and we won't have much fun with him to-day."

Slop glanced with slight contempt at the speaker and walked ahead, never deigning to notice us more than to look around protestingly if we lingered.

When we reached the *locale* of the biting grice, we glanced fearfully around lest she might be dangerously near, but she was nowhere in sight, and we trotted briskly in Slop's wake.

Suddenly grunt! grunt! grunt! In the ditch by the roadside stood the biting grice, and oh, horror! up she came, followed by her family, and took up a position in the path before us. Bella screamed; I yelled. Slop, a good way ahead, looked back, we suppose, and took in the situation at a glance, for our cries had not been uttered many seconds when, with a bound and fierce snarling, Prince Mordge was on the enemy. Fastening his fangs in one of her long ears, he hung on to the sow, who, utterly discomfited by the unexpected attack, squealed and wheeled about in vain attempts to get rid of her antagonist. The mud flew from beneath their feet, as the two performed circle after circle on the road. The young pigs ran hither and thither, adding noise to their mother's. No Billingsgate scold ever gave more vigorous expression to her outraged feelings than that grice did upon that occasion. We were not silent either. Only Prince

Mordge spoke not. Presently Bella advised our retiring from the scene of battle, and off we ran, nor stopped until we reached a safe distance from the combatants. Then we paused to see how the fight was going, and Bella thought of Slop.

"Oh, I hope the grice won't hurt him," she said.

"Hurt Slop!" I replied.

My faith in Prince Mordge was only second to my belief in our father.

The centre of the circles which the combatants had been making had altered considerably since the battle began—had, in fact, reached an edge of the road which overhung the stream. One more frantic tug and wheel around, and over the edge went the grice, with Slop still holding on to her ear. As soon as the astute fellow found that our enemy was so disposed of, and we were out of danger, he let her go, and springing quickly beyond the reach of her formidable tusks, joined us at once, leaving the grice to apply the water cure to her bleeding ear, and to collect her family at her leisure.

How we thanked our brave defender! How we hugged and kissed him; and his beautiful brown eyes —I have never seen more expressive ones—glowed with a noble joy as he returned our embraces. Slop walked between us to school, and lay down at the door when we went in, as much as to say, "Don't alarm yourselves, I'll see you safe home!"

Each day from that hour he became our escort to and from school. I do not know if he remained

about the school premises during school hours. I rather think he ran home or elsewhere at times, returning to his post; but always, when school was dismissed, he was at the door to take us home, and during all the after years of his life—dear faithful friend and companion—he was ever at hand, protecting and guiding Bella and myself. Never again had Prince Mordge to be told to "take care of the bairns." From that hour he made us his peculiar charge. Other bairns there were, younger, not less adventurous, certainly quite as witless, but *they* never received from Slop the same watchful tenderness that we did.

Oh, the rambles which we three took during long happy hours, when skies are so very blue, grass so very green, sea so bright, earth so glad—when youth casts its glamour over everything! Oh, the delight of those days! The pleasure and the poetry of it are cherished by us still, along with the memory of our beloved dog. Dog! Some people use that word as a term of reproach. If I wished to describe a man as everything that is brave, honest, faithful, and good, I could find no word that would better express what I meant to say, because one dog I knew and loved was all that is noble and high-minded.

Sometimes in our wanderings we would lose our way, or become mist-locked. When such was the case we would tell Slop our perplexity, tie a scarf to his collar, and he would take us directly home. Usually both Slop and we went our way as children and dogs do, in a devious manner, attracted aside by

the same class of objects—birds' nests, running brooks, morsels of sticks and stone, rabbit tracks, stray ponies, fishing-boats; but though Slop enjoyed such rambles as much as we did, he never forgot, like us, how time flies. When he believed that it was time to go home he would look up at us, and say, by means of eyes and tail, "No more asides, please;" and if that did not elicit prompt obedience, he would pull our skirts, then trot ahead, and look back to make sure he was followed. He was obliged more than once to use the extreme measure of showing his teeth, and he soon had us in such good order that we never disobeyed beyond *that*, and seldom to such an extent. I have since wondered what Slop would have done if we had dared him *beyond* that limit.

Our peregrinations were many and varied, and earned for us the title of The Pilgrims. On one occasion we went to visit an old nurse, and as she kept a big black dog with whom Slop could never agree, it was deemed best to leave him at home. Our expedition was not likely to be a dangerous one. No rocks or water by the way. No biting grice or wild bull. We had leave to stay for some time if Mam Willa was agreeable, and no hour was fixed for our return, but we knew that we were expected to be at home before nine. But how could *we* tell the time? I do not think that question was permitted sufficient weight afterwards.

We left Mam Willa about five o'clock, but in passing through a hamlet we were invited to join

in a game of "Keen-come-a-lay." I don't know *now* how the game was played, but I do remember that it was one I liked, and on that occasion it was delicious. We did not heed the flight of time. Hour followed hour, and no falling night came to warn us, for in that sweet Shetland autumn the days were long and the nights I never knew. I was asleep before they drew near and awake long after the brief "dim" had vanished before a sleepless sun.

At last an old woman came out of a cottage and said she thought our "folk wad be feared if the bairns stayed longer." We asked the time. Half-past ten! and we had a mile to walk before reaching home! Consternation! We ran off with beating hearts and nimble feet.

Meanwhile the family had not thought of being uneasy until about eight, when Slop suddenly started off with the evident intention of going to find what had detained us. This action on his part led others to say that it was strange we had not returned. Nine o'clock came, ten also, and we did not return; no more did Slop. Then our mother, mother-like, began to fear that we had popped over the cliffs, or been tossed by a bull, and as we neared home we met, one after another, various members of the family who had been sent out to search for The Pilgrims. Presently arrived Slop, following on our track, panting, weary, but rejoiced to find us safe. He had evidently gone to Mam Willa's (afterwards we learned that he had come there and spent some time in searching for us, and had finally

gone off along the spoor, scenting us out), and traced us all the way back.

On the home farm we met our father trying to appear stern, but too glad to receive us safe for angry words. Our appearance caused a reaction in our mother. She had frequently reproved us for lingering too long, and I suppose she thought the present a fitting time for some more severe punishment than a mild reproof. "You bad bairns! You have nearly frightened me out of my wits! Go to bed at once—and supperless, mind. I won't bid you good-night—for a punishment." Away we crept—guilty we did not feel, wretched we certainly were. We had not thought of food while our minds were taken up with "Keen-come-a-lay," but after creeping into bed the pangs of hunger made themselves felt, and they were torturing.

Early next morning we woke up, feeling utterly miserable. The hunger of the evening was nothing to that of the morning. What was to be done? No one was stirring in the house, and it would be hours before any one would be. We sat up and condoled with each other, and were infinitely unhappy, when—suddenly our eyes fell on a white paper parcel lying on a chair close by our bedside. Eagerly we seized it, wondering where it came from, hoping it was meant for us, almost guessing what it contained. On the paper, in large print, was traced, "For the Hungry Pilgrims." We opened the parcel with eager haste, and there were large fair slices of bread thickly but-

tered and sprinkled with sugar! Well did I guess whose tender fatherly heart had thought of its poor naughty "pilgrims"! Young as we were, we could appreciate the wisdom which had found a way of comforting the little truants without interfering with maternal jurisdiction.

I have already hinted that Slop's temper was not naturally amiable. The truth must be stated, or this brief sketch would not be a faithful picture. Slop had standing feuds with every dog in the neighbourhood that was of his own size or larger. Small dogs he disdained. Canine friendships he had none. The cats of our family he endured, but never permitted the smallest indignity from them to pass unresented.

Balaam the Brahmin, a feline of high caste, and much respected by all who knew him, was treated by Prince Mordge with that mixture of deference and condescension which a Napoleon shows towards a Wellington; many a sharp fight took place between the two —fights which usually came to abrupt though noisy conclusion before any serious harm had been done to either of the combatants. It was a study to observe how, five minutes after a furious skirmish in the passage, Slop and Balaam would make their appearance on the parlour hearthrug with the unconscious air and friendly overtures which characterise a meeting of modern emperors who have patched up a peace after some terrible campaigns.

It is a remarkable fact that cat's morality does not include the virtue of honesty. It is evident that they

have no moral sense upon that point, therefore even Balaam could not be trusted alone with food. Slop's sharp bark would usually tell what was going on if the room had been vacated when breakfast was on the table, and hurrying back one would find Balaam inserting his paw into the cream-jug. Slop would be standing by remonstrating in no measured terms, but Balaam seldom heeded him, and would go on supping cream by means of his paw as neatly as if he were using a silver spoon. Slop's services as a policeman soon became of much value, and many times the duty which belonged to a servant was delegated to the dog, he being the more trustworthy animal of the two.

Only once in his life was Slop guilty of dishonesty, and that once was a fall before great temptation. He had returned from a hunting expedition ravenously hungry. We all know how hard it is to withstand the starved cravings of an animal instinct, and we must judge Slop as leniently as we would a man.

The parlour press was usually locked (against boys, not dogs), it being the receptacle for bread, sugar, &c., but it happened sometimes that the door was left open by mistake. On the day when Slop's hunger overcame his sense of right that door was not closed, and every creature about the house knew that bread was to be found in that press. Our brother coming towards the parlour met Slop carrying a round oatcake (called a brünie). As soon as he saw his master Slop dropped the brünie, guilt written in his downcast looks and drooping tail. "Shame upon the dog!" was all Yetta

said. Oh, the abject remorse and contrition which Slop's awakened conscience imparted to his appearance! "Take it back," said his master sternly, and the dog, carrying the stolen morsel, laid it at the press door; then, unable to bear the burden of shame and remorse, he bolted!

Slop was never guilty of a like offence again, and, indeed, was so trustworthy at all times that the cook often set him to watch the bread "firing" on the hearth—a trust which Slop performed most faithfully. That such a position was no sinecure will be understood when I explain that the old kitchen was *free* to every beast belonging to the place, and to half the poor population of the island. Ducks, old wives, cormorants, cats, calves, pensioners, ponies, pigeons, starlings, were continually wandering out and in, but no one of the motley throng dared practise their favourite vice when Prince Mordge was on guard. His one lapse was soon forgotten by all but himself, and to the latest day of his life he remembered with shame and sorrow that petty theft. When offered a *whole* brünie he would hang his head, conscience-stricken, and sneak under the table, but to bits of broken brünies he never objected.

Slop's sense of justice was as sensitive as his sense of shame. Although fond of the water, and a splendid swimmer, he had a decided aversion to anything like forcible immersion; and once a young lady, knowing his feeling on the subject, and fond of teasing, pushed him into the garden well. Insult was added to injury

by the fact that the well was half full of decayed leaves and mud, so that the bath was far from pleasant to a person of cleanly habits. Yet no sooner did poor Slop scramble up than his tormentor pushed him in again. The second time he managed to evade her, and made off. In the evening the lady's contrition prompted her to offer him a saucer of cream to "make it up," but Slop turned away with evident scorn. Again and again she coaxed him, but he rejected every attempt at *being friends*. Some one else, thinking that perhaps he had taken a dislike to the cream, or was suspicious of it, offered it, and at once he accepted the dainty with pleasure; but from the hand which had treated him with such indignity Prince Mordge would take no favour. It was observed that, though he forgave the young lady, after that time he practised a certain reserve in all future dealings with her, and into the garden he never again went of his own free choice.

## CHAPTER IV.

THAT he could reason, and act promptly after putting this and that together in his own mind, was daily shown. Often when his master was going to sail up the fiord he would leave Slop on shore for the purpose of observing his line of action. The sagacious fellow would stand on the beach, observing carefully in what direction the boat was going. Having judged from its position, &c., which part of the shore along the route would probably be the nearest to the boat, he would

make off for such a point, and, swimming boldly out, would intercept the boat as she passed along. He never attempted to swim *after* a boat, knowing well that his powers of getting along in the water were not equal to those of the boat. He always ran along shore, watching its course, and swimming off the moment he found that it was edging nearer, and that he could meet it.

The last great (and active) service which Prince Mordge performed was one of his most notable feats. I was returning home from a long ramble. There were no friendly walls within half a mile, and my usual absent-mindedness had made me oblivious to the fact that Slop and I were not the only wanderers on the hillside. My guardian was trotting home a good way ahead, and I was dreaming as I went. Suddenly there came from no great distance the "muttered thunder" which was, and is, and evermore shall be, the terror of my life. Glancing round, I beheld a fierce little bull, known as the "black baste o' Skae," and the bugbear of our wanderings. He was coming after me at a rapid gallop!

To run, and run wildly, was of course my only line of action; but the "black baste o' Skae" could do the same, and do it with four feet instead of two, which gave him an enormous advantage over me. Oh! the horror of that short bewildered flight! I did not dare lose time by looking behind, yet it was too terrible to know that the foe was on my track, and by his deep-toned threatenings was certainly nearing me rapidly,

and I must not look back. I ran silently for some minutes, then the hopelessness of escape, and the utter terror I felt at not being able to see my danger, overcame every other sensation. I uttered a helpless scream, and faced about, feeling that I would rather stand and meet the enemy than be caught in despairing flight.

But that cry of mine, and the "muttered thunder," had reached Slop's ears. Swift as a bird he came bounding to the rescue, and when the bull was lowering his head for a charge at me, Prince Mordge sprang boldly at the black brow, bent conveniently low for biting, as well as tossing, purposes. Taken aback by the sudden attack, the bull shook himself free, and tore the turf with his foot, as a prelude to making a rush at Slop. On he came, but the dog was too agile for him, and the beast came down on his knees, bellowing furiously, and tearing the earth with his horns. I knew Slop would save me; and, taking advantage of the diversion in the bull's tactics which my good friend's arrival had made, I ran away as quickly as possible—and I ran *that* time with a hope of escape. When I had got over a great part of the way—had, in fact, got within easy distance of our hill-dyke (the wall which divided the home-farm from the common)—I paused to see how the fight went. Slop was barking and jumping in front of the bull, sometimes even making a dash at the brute when its head was lowered for a rush.

But the remarkable part of Slop's proceedings was

this. He had led the bull quite away from the direction in which I had fled, and, by perpetual badgering, roused its wrath to madness, and made it forget *me* entirely. I got the wall between me and danger, and there waited the sequel.

Although Slop was very much engrossed with the bull, he yet knew when I was safe, and as soon as he became aware of that fact, he whisked about without caring what became of his foe. Flying full speed across the hill, Slop came to my feet, panting, but delighted; and the "black baste o' Skae" was left searching madly for a vanished antagonist.

Young dogs were frequently introduced into our family, and to these Slop always exhibited a kindly tolerance which was most impressive. He never seemed jealous of them, but he seldom permitted any familiarities from them, and we believed that he suffered rather than loved them. But when he was old, almost blind, and very feeble, a young Newfoundland was brought home. The lads were in great delight over Pirate, who was exhibited in the parlour to the admiring family. Just then Slop came slowly into the room. He smelt a new arrival, and went up to it. Our father was caressing the pup, and Slop watched them as if he were striving to understand something hard to believe.

I think some heedless words, whose import he understood, must have been spoken, for all at once Slop seemed to think that *he* was no longer of use as the dog of the house, and that Pirate had come to

take his place. A low piteous howl burst from him, and our poor old friend slunk away and meekly took up his abode in the kitchen. Until that time he had resented with much spirit all attempts at making an invalid, or old person, of him, but after Pirate's arrival (and indeed it was too true he had come to be the house-dog, though Slop's place could never be filled by man or dog) Slop never came to sleep under the big chair, but accepted instead the cozy bed we prepared by the kitchen fire, and in many ways plainly told us that he accepted the fate of all living with the patience of a philosopher. As old age crept on he became unable to take long walks, but still he would not allow the Pilgrims to go out without escorting them a part of the way. Then we would say, "Poor Slop is tired. Slop had better go home again."

He would look regretfully in our faces, but took the hint kindly, as it was meant, and would quietly return to the house—not without often pausing to cast a wistful glance after us, who, to tell the truth, were often moved to tears at the change which had come over our cherished companion. *We* were only beginning to realise what it was to live and enjoy life, and *he* was passing away. Yet we had begun the journey together. It seemed hard.

One evening he came out as usual "to follow" us a little way, but the Pilgrims were grown up, and other escort were waiting to watch over our path. Slop looked at the young gentlemen, then at us. After that he licked our hands pitifully, and his mournful

eyes said plainly, "Ah! you have found better friends than your old dog." Bella stopped to fondle him, and I tried to tell him that the whole world could not give us another Prince Mordge. He laid his paws upon the stile when we passed over it, and while we were in sight he remained there. After that he never came farther than the door with us. He had given us into other keeping. We have found none more trusty than his own.

And as he had lived he died—a brave, a leal, a patient spirit. The infirmities of extreme old age were upon him, yet he was Prince Mordge to the last; and, when carried daily by a servant to converse with our father after breakfast, never failed to show that dignity of manner and respectful homage which had always marked him.

I was romping with my baby-boy on the lawn—that lawn where Slop had romped with us, and a generation which knew him not was drawing my thoughts from the past to the present. The beloved master, who had been to Slop in place of God, was far away. Other companions of his youth had also gone out to the battle of life. Like the tolling of a knell, there broke on the baby's laughter a servant's shrill voice, exclaiming, "If ye plase, I tink da auld dog is deein'!"

I ran to the kitchen, and, kneeling by him, I cried, "Slop! Poor old Slop! My dear good old dog!"

He could neither hear nor see, but the faithful heart yet thrilled to the touch of a friendly hand.

With a great effort he raised his head, and meekly laid it upon the hand that was sadly stroking him.

That was all. But I cherish a hope, like that of Pope's untutored Indian, who believes that—

> "Admitted to an equal sky,
> His faithful dog shall bear him company."

## "THE OLD ROCK."

THIS is the pet name which we, Shetlanders, give to the land of our birth—"the melancholy Isles of furthest Thule," and we proudly tell how the Old Rock seems to have magnetic attractions for the scientist as well as the poet and traveller. Edward Forbes spoke of it as a "grand field," and another Naturalist who knew the islands well says, "These remote islands are highly interesting to the Naturalist; for in the variety, and frequently the rarity, of their natural productions, they are not exceeded by any other district of the same extent in Britain."

Year by year our home was visited by Lights of the scientific world, who found a never-failing source of interest in the Isles, and an ever-ready sympathiser in our father. Sometimes they came in parties bringing their house (yacht) with them, and would spend pleasant weeks and months cruising around the islands, dredging, exploring, collecting, loth to leave, returning year by year as if drawn by invisible powers.

Many came alone, or in couples, and lived at Halligarth, or Buness, the welcomed guests of our father and uncle: and thereafter their steadfast friends. Thus did Jamieson, Hooker, Forbes, Goodsir, Gwynn Jeffries,

and many another famous Naturalist. Thus did such scientists, archæologists, and men of letters as M. Biot, Kater, Airy, Sir Henry Dryden, Charles Lyell, Prince Lucien Bonaparte, Dasent, Tupper, Adam Clarke, &c. To us the coming of such guests was like glimpses of a new world. To them the "Old Rock" was as a charmed land binding its spell upon their spirits. The infinite variety in its sea and rock scenery, the copiousness of Nature's productions—botanical, mineralogical, ornithological—the peace and freedom of life in the Isles, all combined to make it a "pleasant land" to men of science, a fount of inspiration to literati. One spoke the thought of many when he said, "There is a fascination about your rocks which I can't explain, but which I feel. It is something of the sentiment which binds the Switzer to his mountains, the sailor to the ocean. *This* must be the magnetic Isle which drew the ships to it!" That is the romantic aspect of the Old Rock:—Geologically, its formation is for the most part composed of primitive rocks—gneiss, granite, mica-slate, quartz, clay-slate, serpentine, limestone, and euphotide or diallage rock. There is therefore ample scope for the prosecution of geological and mineralogical researches.

The flora of Shetland is copious, although—owing no doubt to the comparatively low elevation of even the highest land, "Rooness Hill," which is barely fifteen hundred feet above the level of the sea—there are scarcely any Alpine plants properly so called.

Of wild quadrupeds there are very few, but that

deficiency is made up by the great variety of birds, especially seabirds, which literally swarm. Certainly in no district within the limits of the British Isles are there equal facilities for studying bird life.

Then of marine plants and animals of the lower orders, there is also great variety: so that a Naturalist has here an admirable field for the prosecution of whatever may be his particular department of science.

Shetland is also rich in legend and antiquarian lore, although little has as yet been done to explore these fields.

Here also the artist, professional or amateur, will find no lack of subjects for brush, pencil, or camera —in great stretches of moorland and heather, in magnificent and fantastically shaped rocks, in old ocean in all his moods, in sunrises and sunsets unsurpassed anywhere, in old Brochs, old mills, fishermen's huts, semi-wild ponies and sheep.

But to the sportsman no less than to the scientist, the antiquarian and the artist, does the Old Rock afford manifold attractions. It is true we have no deer and no foxes; but we have seals and otters, whales and porpoises. A whale-hunt is most exciting sport; and seal-hunting, I hesitate not to say, is in no respect inferior to deer-stalking. We have no grouse, no pheasants, no partridges, and only a very few hares in one or two localities. But we have great numbers of snipe, and of golden plover, many species of wild duck, rock pigeons, wild geese, wild swans in spring and autumn, and rabbits in abundance

almost everywhere. And we have multitudes of sea-birds, some of which require no small dexterity to knock over. If you are a true sportsman, I take it you will not appraise sport according to the market value or edibility of your trophies of the chase, but find its chief attraction and charm in the exercise of skill, and in meeting and successfully surmounting difficulties and sometimes dangers in its pursuit. I could never see the sport of a battue. But standing in a boat dancing on the always more or less agitated water at the foot of their haunts in the high precipices, it is capital sport to shoot puffins, guillimots and cormorants, as they come whirring past you with the velocity of an arrow. In this connection I quote the words of our father in a paper on seal-hunting—"Often we range along many miles of coast without meeting with a single seal; but our wanderings are through scenery the most majestic. Who that has ever looked upon them, can forget these 'naked' and primitive isles of the Northern Atlantic—their melancholy moors and lonely valleys, their stupendous precipices and foaming surfs, lowering clouds, and rushing maelströms, where the ancient lullaby of the infant Viking was the hurricane, and his playground the ocean! In these wild and sequestered solitudes, unbroken by the tumults of faction and the inroads of civilization, is to be found that untrammelled freedom about which philosophers reason and poets sing; and it is well to refresh ourselves, in this agitated period of the march of matter, with those pure and ennobling sentiments

which the presence of Nature in her sublimer aspects is calculated to inspire. If the fox-hunter has counties to scour, we have islands; if we want his woodlands and rivers, we have our rocks and ocean; instead of chargers, we have boats the finest in the world, combining symmetry, safety, and celerity. Our dogs are far superior in definite attachment and versatile intelligence to the machines of the pack; if we do not enjoy the pleasure of breaking our necks in leaping hedges, we can yet prove our mortality by capering over precipices, breasting billows and ploughing breakers. Yet some there are who call themselves sportsmen, who, if they have not a partridge and pointer, a pack and a *brush*, to look upon, consider all hunts as unworthy of attention. Not so thought such veterans as Sparmann and Cartwright, Lloyd and Waterton: for it is not the name of an object of game, whether this be fox or phoca, deer or tiger, but that which can afford best play to those faculties and associations which he loves best to exercise and to cherish, that delights the soul of the true amateur hunter. Nor can I enter into the feelings of those sportsmen whose pleasure is solely in dexterous killing; there should be the accessories of objects, such as science, utility, health, to entitle us to deprive an animal of life; we are made lords of the irrational creatures but not to lord it over them. I have repeatedly had for half-an-hour, under aim of an unerring gun, a seal lying within forty yards of me, and could not find it in my heart to fire; yet I had enjoyed all

the enthusiasm of the hunt up to the moment of slaying, and this unalloyed pleasure in addition of quietly observing the drowsy Triton reposing on his ocean rock, like an ancient sea king in his stronghold of plunder, when withdrawing the finger from the trigger I started him from his slumbers by a warning shout that sent him plunging into his native element, with a strong consciousness of his danger, and I hope a grateful sense of my forbearance."

Then in regard to the other great branch of sport, fishing, both with rod and line, you will nowhere find more ample scope for your energies and enthusiasm than in Shetland. We have no large rivers of course, and not many or very large salmon, but we have abundance of magnificent sea and fresh water trout. The former are generally angled for with fly in the sea, and splendid sport it is, as you will allow, to bring home, as you may often do without considering it extraordinary, a basket of twenty or thirty beautiful sea trout, averaging from two to three pounds weight.

Then there are the hand-line and long-line fishings, when your catch will consist of a great variety of sea-fish, turbot, halibut, cod, ling, tusk, skate, eels, haddocks and whitings. Mackerel also are plentiful on the coast, and it is capital sport fishing them.

The sillack and piltack fishing will receive a more detailed notice than can be given here. I will merely say that like the scientist and man of letters, the sillack and piltack seem drawn by mystic spells to the Old Rock, but they gather around its shores to

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"The Old Rock which was our cradle."—*Page* 273.

their own destruction, in which particular they differ from the "wise men" who haunt the Isles betimes.

If you want a thoroughly enjoyable two months' holiday, in pursuit of health, science, art, sport, or to combine them all, which is best of all, go and visit the Old Rock, and you will find it—as many a great man has done, and as we Shetlanders devoutly believe it to be —the very best place in the world for living a life of dream-like freedom and peace and simple pleasures.

It is true we Hialtlanders leave our rocky cradle in the North Sea, and make homes for ourselves in far lands. The cradle becomes too small for the child when its baby-time is over. Yet the full-grown man's thoughts go yearningly back to the love-bound nest of infancy. So do our hearts cling to memories of the Old Rock which was our cradle, and is the resting-place of our fathers. Its spell is ever upon us, keeping warm the recollections of happy youth, and that spell is a God-given one. It is the love of Home!

# *WEIRD SISTERS.*

## CHAPTER I.

In a land where doctors were few and far between, the ancient Dames who presided over the advent of "Troublesome Pleasures," were an important and influential class.

They were not only sick-nurses. They were wise women and sibyls. They acted as physicians, lawyers, priests, and were consulted in all emergencies. They meddled in everybody's affairs, and knew the secrets of all their neighbours.

Thus their power was unlimited, and when they chanced to be ignorant or unscrupulous (as was too often the case), their actions were the reverse of commendable.

In the Shetland Isles women do not adopt their husbands' surnames, and the title of "Mrs." was never given to a peasant's wife. She who lived to see her children's children grown-up had the respectful appellation of Minnie (grandmother) prefixed to her christian name; while the nurse and wise-woman was always

spoken of as "Mam" (mother) Betsy, Merran, or whatever her baptismal name chanced to be.

"The doctor" was of course the sibyl's born-enemy, he being the sole person who ever dared oppose her practices, and it was a triumph when one member of the Noble Profession brought over to his way of thinking, and his way of acting, a sister of the "mystic order."

This was Mam-Willa, who, under our father's tuition, became an able sick-nurse, freed from the prejudices of her sisters, and the valued, sympathetic friend of women, "high and low," in the hours when they were rejoicing over the new-born or weeping by the dead.

She was the mother of a goodly family; her husband was a fisherman, greatly inferior to her in intellect, but good-natured and good-looking (two points which have great weight with clever women seeking their mates!)

Willa was the name-child of a (long-since defunct) member of our family, whose mother took Willa to be her little maid at the early age of seven.

The solemn old lady of ninety impressed the child very much, and was greatly influential in forming her character, giving to it some of her own dignified old-fashioned formality.

It was at this good dame's knee that Willa learned to read, and as the Bible was the only lesson-book in those days (for I am speaking of a century ago), she became familiar with Holy Writ after a more enlight-

ened manner than was usual among her country-folks.

It was also when in attendance upon Mrs. Archbald that she received a strong religious bias, as well as formed those habits which made her afterwards such an excellent nurse. Mam-Willa was an elderly woman when I remember her, and she always wore a professional-looking black gown with white cap tied down by a sooty-coloured silk kerchief. She was lean and grey-complexioned, and had a habit of twisting her bony fingers about which impressed my childish imagination very much. But she had very kindly eyes, and a gentle voice; also great tact and patience.

There was always jubilee among us children when Mam-Willa came to pay a non-professional visit.

She was a notable hand at mending socks, and we rejoiced when we saw her sit in a cozy low chair (I never remember seeing her sitting on any but a *low* seat) with a great basket of stockings beside her; for then we knew that delightful stories would be told us, and dainty tit-bits would be produced from her capacious pocket, rewards for those who were first to grasp the moral of what she had narrated, or for those who were the best behaved, or for those who required bribing to keep the peace. Like the "pious Æneas," Mam-Willa had rewards for *all!*

She could keep us quiet for hours while our overtaxed mother was taking a rest, and our anxious father was prosecuting his avocations, assured that

no bairn of his would come to grief while Mam-Willa was on the premises.

It was double jubilee when we were allowed to go and spend a day at her cottage. Sometimes our mother was set on a pony and—escorted by a troop of us—made a welcome descent upon Cloogan.

Mam-Willa was never taken unawares by such visitations; her hospitality was always ready and full; and if she herself chanced to be from home, one of her daughters was there to give hearty welcome to all who came.

What rare basins of curds and cream and "kirn-milk" were ladled out for us on such occasions! What splendid scones and brünies were baked and covered with rich sweet butter! What delicious cream-cheeses and fresh eggs were put up for us to carry home!

Sometimes Mam-Willa's man would take us for a paddle in his little boat, or—if the tide were out—would escort us into the isle of Hoonie, where we were free to pick up the eggs of sea-fowl, shells and other ocean treasures.

When we were grown and wished to make a picnic for our visitors from far lands, we knew no more delightful locality for the purpose than the vicinity of Mam-Willa's home. Her blithe girls would boil our potatoes, and brew our tea in the cottage, while she sat among us not the least loved and honoured of our guests.

Our eldest (living) brother was her favourite, for

she had been his foster-mother as well as nurse, and her demonstrations on his return home, during college vacation, always aroused our amusement and perhaps our jealousy.

I well remember one occasion when we had landed on the shore and Mam-Willa came down to greet us, not knowing that our brother had arrived. But as she was seen to approach he went to meet her, and there was a very affectionate interchange of salutations, which caused considerable diversion to a young lady who was our guest. She made some laughing remark to Mam-Willa about it, and the old woman replied—"Ah, my dear, if ye had kissed his dear lips as aften as I hae done ye widna wonder that I love him as I do!"

This was disconcerting to a young lady, and quite unanswerable.

Mam-Willa's house was situated in a most wild and romantic spot, looking out upon a wide sea, and far from all other dwellings: her nearest neighbours were a mile over the hill, and to right and left stretched long tracks of moor and fallow-land and rock.

Below the cottage the hill-side sloped sharply to the sea. A tongue of pure, white sand ran out, connecting the little Isle of Hoonie with Unst at low water.

When the tide was in, a strong current flowed over the sand bank and skerries, leaving only a snow-belt below Cloogan.

My first clear perception of the beauty of Nature is

associated with that shore—when I was about eight years of age. My mother was spending a few weeks with Mam-Willa, and had taken "Benjamin" and myself with her.

It was sunset, and a most lovely, quiet summer evening. The little brother and I had been playing for hours at our mother's feet as she sat by the shore talking to Mam-Willa; but he grew tired and was carried to the house by "bonnie Jean," while Mam-Willa strayed along the beach picking up some kind of seaweed which she said was "good for folk." Then my mother called me to her, and, pointing to the sea, said, "Isn't God good to give us such a bonnie world to live in?" I remember clearly the sensation of delight with which I suddenly awoke to see what a world of beauty and wonder lay around me; and as her graceful white hand pointed out the tints of rock and grass, the sheen upon the seaweeds, the glory in the heavens, the life and mystery of the burnished ocean, my child-heart swelled with feelings new and indescribable.

Then in soft melodious tones she repeated the hundred-and-fourth Psalm, and Byron's exquisite lines, beginning—

> "Roll on, thou deep and dark blue Ocean, roll."

I did not comprehend the poems, of course; but they are for ever associated in my mind with that scene; and I believe my predilection, in later years, for the Psalmist and Byron may be traced to this source.

I think she must have been saying the lines as much to herself as to me, and they had some touching association, for they were spoken with tears.

Then she took from my hand a razor-shell, and talked about it, and about some wild-flowers I had laid in her lap, while still her tears were falling, though her words were sweet and her smile bright.

Whenever I look on a sea-pink or a razor-shell, that scene on the sands o' Cloogan comes before me, and I wish that I could once again look on Nature with my mother's faith, and with the hope of childhood.

Presently Mam-Willa joined us again, and gently suggested that "it was ower late ta be sittin' oot;" so, leaning on her arm, and talking earnestly of holy things, our mother returned to the house.

Long afterwards I was recalling that time to Mam-Willa's recollection, and she said, "I mind it weel. Your dear mother was coming through deep waters at that time, and she was that like an angel I maist lippened that she wad leave the earth a'together."

But for Mam-Willa's watchful tendance and womanly sympathy our mother might indeed have left the earth during some of her many moments of trial; but the strong good sense and composure of her faithful nurse sustained the more nervous, imaginative temperament, and helped it to rise above pain and tribulation, when without such timely aid it might have sunk.

Although Mam-Willa abjured all the superstitious rites which her sisterhood practised, and though she

believed implicitly in Almighty power ruling all the powers of darkness, she yet had a lingering belief that "gude practices could do nae harm." So when my first child was born I found that she had laid a Bible under the cradle pillow, and had fastened the bed-curtains with pins set in the form of a cross.

These were old observances which were supposed to protect mother and child from Trow-interference.

Aged as she had now become, and conservative in habits as she had always been, Mam-Willa was right willing to receive new teaching at all times, and the young doctor, my husband, being a pupil of Sir James Simpson's, could give her some advanced instruction in her profession. She eagerly studied his books and "sat at his feet," but I heard her once ask our father, "What do *ye* think o' yon chloroform, sir? The young doctor is a' for it, but I wad like to ken your opinion. Ye see the young folk are a' for the new-fangled ways; and I'm no saying but the new ways are gude ways. Still a body canna' tak *a'* thing withoot muckle consideration."

Mam-Willa lived to celebrate her centenary, I believe, and was possessed of all her faculties (except hearing) to the last.

Although she had been "Mam" to most of the people in the island, *we* looked upon her as a sort of family relic of our own, and when some of the youthful members were visiting the old home they were taken to see her. "And noo," she said as she received and blessed the little ones, "I've seen seven generations o'

your bluid; frae auld Mrs. Archbald, Lord bless her soul! to this bairn; may Heaven's hand be about it!"

When I bade Mam-Willa good-bye some years before her death, she let me know she did not expect we should meet again, for her parting words were solemn and impressive. "Fare weel, my dear, till the resurrection o' the just!".

## CHAPTER II.

ANOTHER wise-woman was Kirsty Thomson. Her mother had been a Dame, reputed sage and witchy, and a portion of her mantle was supposed to have fallen upon her daughters, who right willingly allowed the statement to pass uncontradicted. I think they honestly believed it themselves—at least Kirsty did. She never denied that she had doings with "them that must na be named," and her imagination was so vivid, her earnestness so active, that I am sure she was quite unaware that her own natural shrewdness, acquaintance with the characters and habits of her neighbours, and coincidence, as well as obvious consequence of certain actions, were responsible for that which she attributed to the influence of Trows and spells.

Kirsty was learned in the mysteries of "saining," and knew many incantations; but it was not till the prime of her days was past, and the active out-of-door life in which she delighted was no longer possible, that she took up the trade of sick-nurse, and she was never a proficient in it. Her nature was too rapid and im-

patient, her ways too coarse and "loud" for the long-suffering, loving tendance which the ailing require. Hysterical women she shook and scolded. A weakly babe had no mercy at her hands, and was quietly permitted to lose the flicker of life it brought with it into the world if Kirsty thought it was likely to prove a troublesome child to bring up.

Deformity and infirmity were abhorrent to her, and I have heard her declare, "Mercy save me! as *I* think, a bairn born into this evil world wanting some power it ought to hae had, should never be let live."

Such sentiments came naturally from her own abundant health and vitality, for which she was wont to "bless the Lord," and call "the best o' *a'* He bestows."

She was a woman of strong and masculine build, and would boast that her fist had more than once avenged the wordy insult of some audacious man.

She was fond of telling how once a party of six boys "set on" her. The laddies doubtless desired to prove if her oft-boasted valour was a fact, and they did prove it.

"They came roond me like heathen Philistines aboot the Lord's anointed" (she said) "wi' their fists in my face and jeers upon their tongues. So I set my back to the stane-wa', and stripping my arms to ower the elbows, I bade them come on! Come on, every mither's son o' you! Kirsty is no' feared to meet the hale six!"

The boys had not been so much in earnest as Kirsty, for, in reply to her challenge, they laughed and ran

away. She believed and affirmed that they were afraid to meet her in open fight.

She had Scripture at her finger ends, and on the tip of a most eloquent tongue. All her language was steeped in the rich colouring of Jewish lore, and when deeply stirred, her speech "poured forth like the rock of Moses" in a torrent that was quite startling in its picturesque and forcible volubility. She loved an active out-of-door life, and worked upon our farm as well as the best man could have done. Spade, shovel, pitch-fork were all one to Kirsty.

Some cottages (that of her ancestors among the rest) had been cleared away to make room for our father's house and home-farm, therefore Kirsty felt as though she belonged to the soil of the place.

A friend of ours asked her once, "How long have you been about Halligarth, Kirsty?"

She struck an attitude after her usual fashion when intending to be impressive, and stretching forth both hands with dramatic effect, made answer, "When the first foundations were laid, lo, *I* was there!"

Kirsty married her cousin, a large, soft-hearted, soft-headed man; and, when telling us of the courtship, she said "He was been after me for mony a season, and I had tokens frae abune that *it* was appointed to me. So, in the course o' time when it appeared that Willie was no' like to speak out, I just says to him one nicht—'Willie, if it is to be that dö (thou) and I is to join hands, let us have it so:' and it was so!"

They had two children. The son died in infancy. The daughter inherited none of her mother's strength, but something more than her father's weakness. She had what is expressively termed "a want"—that is a certain silliness and weakness approaching imbecility —and she brought shame upon her honest parents.

In wrath and sorrow they took a step most unusual in the Shetland Isles. They banished her from their house. The young woman lived for a short time with relatives not far from her home, and the parents often saw her pass their door. This she doubtless did "of a set purpose."

Kirsty's maternal feelings yielded sooner than Willie's anger, and she proposed that Merran should be recalled; but the father—not usually firm on any point—held out against the proposal. But it happened (and now I shall tell the story in Kirsty's words) "as I stood by oor door ae bright Sabbath morning wha should gang by but Merran wi' her head upon her breast. Aye, she micht weel hang him low! And I cried to Willie 'Come here!'

"When he cam to my side I pointed to oor bairn and I said, 'She's the only thing o' the kind that we hae; ca' her in to oor door if dö wad hae the door o' Heaven opened to dee.' So he ca'd Merran, and she cam, greetin'." *

The old couple adopted Merran's handsome boy, and soon grew devotedly attached to him, and proud of him—forgetful, apparently, of all but the fact that

* Weeping.

he was "the only thing o' the kind" that belonged to them.

Kirsty was extremely kind to her husband's old father (who was also her uncle, but she always called him "guid-faither," which is father-in-law). He was a patriarch of over ninety (when I remember him); and people who didn't know better on such points affirmed that "auld Donald Winwick" was in his dotage, but Kirsty would not allow that. When the old man prattled of seeing fairies, talking to Trows, being transported to regions of wonder in the heart of the earth, Kirsty would say, "Believe it, by my saul; my guid-faither is nearing the heavenly lands, and to the like o' him is vouchsafed visions that the eye o' them that's *in the strife* may no' look upon."

Later she told some of us that her guid-faither had "seen and heard what must no' be named to them that's no' wise in the works o' the Unseen," and had imparted to Kirsty much of what had been revealed to him.

Her husband died of a brief and not painful illness, and this affliction—after the first passionate burst of sorrow was over—Kirsty bore with manly resignation.

When I went to condole with her afterwards, she told me she "kent weel what was comin' lang afore: for in a vision o' the nicht I heard a voice say, 'He will establish the border of the widow,' and I kent the meaning o' *that*. So when him that I took by the hand fell ill I tauld him what was to be. I said to him, 'Oor hands are to fa' asunder noo, by the word o'

Him that's ower a.' Prepare dy saul for what the Lord will send.' And he made answer to me, 'The Lord kens best. If my time is come, I canno gang by it.' Yes, my dear, the Lord kens best at a' times. Blessed be His name!"

Kirsty's language, besides being graphic, was distinctly not Parliamentary at times. She was often heard to curse her enemies in the language of Holy Writ, and call the Psalmist to "bear witness afore the Throne that this is righteous anger."

In her old age she had a habit of speaking her thoughts aloud; and if she had been engaged in heated argument (as was frequently the case) one might learn all that had been said on both sides if one took the trouble to follow Kirsty within earshot as she trudged along by herself unconscious of being dogged.

On one occasion she had been quarrelling with another noted Sibyl, and her road home lay past a hill which has a clear echo. She was cursing her adversary aloud as she went along, and the "Muckle Heogue" gave back the words. All unconscious that *she* had spoken, oblivious to the violence of her words and feelings, Kirsty came home and reported that "there were strange doings in the heart o' the earth; and the Almighty kens—none besides—what sauls were bound within the hills. For as I cam' by the Muckle Heogue I heard the spirits, chained in darkness within the hill, curse and swear as only them that's in torment ken hoo to misuse the Name o' Him that's ower a'!"

After she was a widow, and took up the profession of sick-nurse, Kirsty wore douce black raiment, and the orthodox white cap with crimped border, and black kerchief over it. But in her middle age I remember her as usually wearing a short skirt of blue serge, a loose jacket (called a "slug"), woollen stockings of her own knitting and rivlins (skin moccasins). A crimson or blue kerchief, knotted under the chin, kept her grizzled hair in place. Her features were rugged and masculine, but well formed, and she had a frank intelligent expression.

Full of vitality, her energy never flagged, she was never idle, and never untidy:—a wholesome, hearty country woman who believed implicitly in herself, and the Powers that be. The supernatural and the superstitious had become so twisted together in her mind that it was vain to attempt showing her where the one properly began and the other left off!—vain to dream of convincing her, "wha kent the Bible weel frae brod to brod," that witches, giants, evil spirits, miracles, were obsolete.

"What's been may be," was Kirsty's answer to all one might say on such points: and of course there was no reply possible when she affirmed, "My dear that ye are, I care no' what them that's upon the earth this day may declare. This I can say, by Him that rules abune, and has tauld in His blessed Book hoo Satan and a' his kind shall be let loose at the last o' Time, I have *seen* and *heard* what I may no' name to *you*."

Kirsty was earnest and sincere according to her lights, and "dropped" quickly, at a good old age with faculties all undimmed. She had a presentiment of her end at hand, and with her wonted impetuosity set her house in order and passed behind the veil "in sure and certain hope."

## CHAPTER III.

I THINK "Gonga" must have had gipsy blood in her. Her father was a sort of gaberlunzie, and doubtless from him she inherited her vagrant habits and restless nature.

She must have been quite forty-five when I first remember her: but the Shetland women wear well, and she was at that time a handsome strong creature full of animal-life and spirits. Her hair was black and curled, her complexion clear and nut-brown, her feet and hands beautifully shaped. She sang and danced well, and altogether had much the appearance of a gipsy queen.

Gonga was greatly beloved of us children (her favourites, I should rather say); her devotion to our wants, her passionate caresses, her fierce defence, her subtle excuses on our behalf, made us look to Gonga as to a "shield and buckler."

She had not been taught to read when young, and could not be coaxed to learn when grown-up, and was in truth very ignorant in some ways. As all ignorant people are, she was very prejudiced, and if she took a

notion into her head nothing short of "blood and thunder" could have caused her to change her mind. Being so good-looking and lively, Gonga had many sweethearts, but she seems to have acted in a very independent and gipsy-fashion towards them. The more wise of the men drew back in time, and well for them that they did so, for Gonga would have been a thorn in the flesh of any man. One fellow, who must have been fifteen years her junior, was her devoted slave for a decade or more. She usually spoke of him with a contemptuous pity; but when news of his death came, though she strove to appear indifferent, Gonga felt it. His constancy had touched a tender chord; and long afterwards she admitted that "though Tammy was a füle, he was to be depended till; and *that* could no' be said o' them that thoucht themselves his betters."

She was not made for domestic life, although passionately devoted to us, and unwearied in her watching over the infancy of more than one of our father's children.

Notwithstanding her roving and unsettled tastes, she had the feline instinct of clinging to locality, and loved the old hut at Colvidale, although affection for us held her bound to Halligarth.

She could never be brought to obey rules, or adapt herself to the ways of civilized life; and she was for ever rebelling against our mother's jurisdiction.

The hot wild nature could not brook restraint, and when a "flare-up" came, Gonga would rush away to Colvidale, and remain away for weeks and months,

vowing that she would never "darken the door o' Halligarth again." But her vow did not prevent her from coming within the precincts of the home-farm to see the children she loved.

Lalya and myself were (in later times) her particular pets, and when one, or other, of us was playing out-of-doors and a little way from the house, suddenly and stealthily Gonga would appear from behind a wall and almost smother us with hugs and sweeties. We would cling to her, and cry, and beg her to come back to the house; but Gonga was obstinate, and continued to sulk —her heart torn all the time—until it would happen that, on some such occasion, our father would appear on the scene. He saw a great deal that children and servants never dreamed he saw, and was quite aware of Gonga's stolen visits.

As if by mere accident he would come upon her with us, and would say, as if she had but paused from some farm-work for a few minutes, "Oh, is that you? There's yon roogue o' fælls" (pile of sods) "to be carried into the easter-park, you'd better begin at it to-morrow."

On the morrow Gonga with her keshie on her back would be busily employed transferring the roogue as if there had been no interruption in her service, and later she would join the other servants in the house, and no retrospective remarks were made, but all were glad to have Gonga back.

Our mother did not like, not understanding, such ways; but she could forgive much to Gonga, who had

faithfully and tenderly nursed one of our sisters during her last days, and had also been with one of the little ones when it died.

When Gonga "differed" with our father she did not take such an extreme measure as forsaking the place. She merely dropped keshie and spade, and hid herself in some corner till we coaxed her to forget the trouble for our sakes.

She was never disrespectful or disobedient to him in his presence. If she objected to carrying out his orders, she always waited till he had taken himself off; and if he chanced to find her—even when her sulky fit was at its height—he had but to speak, and Gonga submissively obeyed.

When the power of his presence was removed she relapsed into sulks, and when assured that his eye was off her she vanished!

If her quarrel was with the other servants she would simply abstain from sharing their meals and room.

I have known her sleep out of doors under shelter of a hay rick rather than occupy her place beside a fellow-servant who had offended her; and she would take her meals for weeks in some neighbouring cottage rather than associate with "Yon trooker Beina" or "da vild carkeege o' Glawthin." She was hard working and healthy, and made an excellent servant notwithstanding her objections to methodical ways. Routine was so irksome to her that she always contrived to find excuse for a change of employment.

As time went on everybody about the place learned to know Gonga's "ways," and scenes were avoided by allowing her to "put her hand" to whatever work she pleased.

Fortunately, what she pleased to do she did well at all times. One day she was delving a field, or harrowing a "rig;" next she was washing clothes. You would find her one hour cutting grass, and in a few minutes you would see the sickle laid on the grass heap and Gonga was off milking cows. Next she was catching a pony, or dressing a child, or tending a sick dog.

She was easily beguiled from tantrams by being sent a message to some distant part of the island. She would set out gloomily, but the tramp over hill and dale, the freedom, the solitude of Nature, the gossip with friends, acted like magic on the "dark spirit," and Gonga would come back all smiles and cheerful obedience, her trouble forgot, her "dorts" dispersed to the winds.

When sorrow of any kind brooded over our house Gonga's leal and thoughtful service could be depended upon. Rest, sleep, comfort she cared not for, nor sought, while it was possible for her to alleviate the trouble in any way. A sure sign that the family-storm was passing over would be Gonga "ta'an the dorts again."

She did not scruple to "speak her mind" about any of us whose actions displeased her: but woe to the outsider who dared breathe one word "against the

name" in Gonga's hearing! It could not be done twice by the same individual; and even if one ventured to tell her that she herself had "said as bad," she was ready to retort: "Dat's nae business o' yours. *I* may say at a time what I like; but the family kens what my thouchts are, and the hale island has seen my deeds."

Her ideas of right and wrong were very confused. She would have been virtuously indignant if you had accused her of dishonesty when she klickit (abstracted) sugar or cake to be afterwards surreptitiously doled out to us.

She never dreamed she was encouraging deceit when she screened a child from deserved punishment by deliberate falsehood.

I had forbidden my little son to remain in the kitchen when the servants were at meals, for I knew, from my own experience, how they stuffed children at such times.

I suspected he had disobeyed in this respect, and I went to the kitchen and asked, "Do you know where Harry is just now?" Right glibly old Gonga made reply, "Na, my dear, what should we ken o' the bairn?"

At that moment from under her shawl popped out Harry's head, and his merry voice answered me, "Here I am, Mamma."

The "black fingers" (taws) were used on one occasion, and Gonga, wrathful at sight of the child's tears, abstracted the leather "rod of correction," and

put it in the fire, thinking in that way to stop maternal jurisdiction.

Gonga thought no one knew that she had made an end of the "black fingers;" but her action *had* been observed, and the taws were recovered, but in a state which disabled them from further use.

She was sent with a note to the store, and was given a sealed packet to carry back. No comment had been made regarding the lost taws, but the parcel she brought was opened in her presence, and proved to be a new taws!

Not one word said Gonga, but she never again interfered with the discipline of the younger generation.

She was a heathen as far as orthodox religion was concerned, and could never be taught the elements of a creed. Yet her reverence for God and His works was deep and real.

She would close ears and heart to church-teaching, but was not lacking in the "knowledge that cometh from within."

The only time I ever remember hearing Gonga utter an aspiration beyond the things of this life, was when some rockets, &c., were being discharged.

She had never seen fireworks before, and as the brilliant torches, stars, and wheels flew into the dark sky, Gonga called out, "O Lord, grant that I may gang up like yon when my time comes!"

She had one short and sharp illness, and for a few days we feared the worst. I was sitting with

her one night, at that time, and she looked so death-like I took a panic believing she was dying, and I feared she was resting on no hope beyond earth.

So I spoke to her of her state, and about God being near to all in sickness, and to all who sought Him.

She listened quietly, and then answered, "Never fash your dear heart about me. The Lord, He kens why He made me what I am, and He'll pit a' richt for me ony way He likes."

As she grew older her temper and Arab-instincts toned down, but her affections were as hot as ever. She wailed as passionately for my "one wee lassie" as she had done thirty years before for my little sisters; and when I left the old Home for a far land, she clutched my dress and the baby on my knee with a desperate agony which I can never forget. As I looked back I saw her fling herself on the snow-drift, and the last sound which followed me from home was Gonga's bitter cry for "the bairns."

Fortunately for her the one of us who had been her chief darling was still left, and Lalya, and her bairns, watched over Gonga's latest years, and smoothed the last bit of her way. She lived to a very old age, and there was "light at eventide," for with child-like weakness and dependence came child-like faith, and Gonga, ere she drifted into the Borderlands, was trusting entirely to Him who "pits a' richt."

## *THE EELA.*

"A GREAT 'steethe' (shoal) of piltacks set in at Muness, and great numbers being 'drawn.'" Such was the news brought to me one day in mid-winter. Like almost every Shetland boy and lad I was an enthusiastic fisher both with rod and line; so here was a fine chance of a day's sport not to be let slip. My first run was to Peter, my uncle's factotum—his friend, adviser, and companion in all his expeditions, fully as much as his trusted servant. He was a man of great natural ability and good sense—also a capital boatman, a good shot, and a first-rate fisherman. He was prodigiously strong, an athlete with whom no man in the island was able successfully to compete. Owing to this and to his commanding presence and force of character, quite as much as to the quasi authority, which, in virtue of his office and sterling worth, was conceded to him by our seniors, we respected him greatly. Certainly we also stood just a little in awe of him; but he was always obliging, good tempered and sympathetic, and therefore a prime favourite with us. Withal he was a very prudent, cautious man. It was therefore always considered quite safe for us to go on any expedition

commanded by the redoubtable Peter. Securing his co-operation and leadership, we were pretty sure to have little difficulty in gaining our father's assent to enterprises which, under less trustworthy guidance, would have been disallowed.

"Have you heard the news, Peter?" said I. "Any quantity of piltacks at Muness. We must have a day at them. Will you come?" "Yes," said he good-naturedly, "I have heard about the piltacks, and will go: and let it be to-morrow. The weather promises to be fine. We'll get Charlie and Magnie to make up our crew. See you have plenty of flies, and all your fishing gear in good order." All was soon arranged, and that afternoon and evening I spent in overhauling my tackle, "busking" some new flies, and preparing for an early start next morning.

Muness is the rocky peninsula which forms the south-east corner of Unst, and is distant from Baltasound about six miles. It was on the north and lee side of this point that the piltacks had "set in."

Sillacks and piltacks are the young of the saithe, and form a most important item in the cuisine of a Shetland household. They swarm around the coast, and are the most unsophisticated of fish, requiring no cunningly-devised flies to lure them. They are always in season, and are nutritious, wholesome food, and withal of a very delicious flavour, either fresh, or pickled and partially dried. When in their early or fry stage they are "sillacks," not more than four or five inches long. In winter they "set in"—that is, con-

gregate in immense shoals, in the Shetland voes. A few yards from the beach or rocks you see them, on looking over the gunwale of your boat, a dense mass of scarcely moving life, with their heads all in one direction. Your rod of eight or ten feet long, and not having a great deal of spring, is made by yourself out of a small slip of Norway pine. The line scarcely so long as the rod—no reel is used—is made of horse hair, which every Shetland fisherman is deft at twisting with his fingers, and the flies, three or four in number, attached to the casting line, about a foot apart, are simply common pins bent in the shape of a hook, or small hooks with the barb pinched down, roughly trimmed with the filaments of a white feather, a little white hair from any animal—cow, dog, or cat—that grows it; or best of all, a lock from the head or beard of some venerable patriarch of the *genus homo*. Every cast of your line secures a fish, perhaps two, or three, or even four. There seems to be a competition amongst the eager little sillacks which shall be caught first. This will continue all day, and the biggest basket is got by the angler whose manipulation is the quickest. A barb to the hook is never used: it would be a hindrance, as it would take too much time to free it. A fairly good fisher will in a few hours secure as many sillacks as he can carry home. Another way in which great quantities of sillacks are caught is called "poking." Round the mouth of a bag net or "poke" is attached a light iron hoop from six to ten feet in diameter, from which three or four stays are gathered

together and tied to the end of a stout stick six or eight feet long. The water is not more than one or two fathoms deep: you lower your poke to the bottom; the sillacks scuttle off in all directions, and for a moment you see the stones or sand or seaweed through the clear water almost like a well with a wall of fish all round. You watch for a few minutes, and presently the dark brown mass of sillacks, several feet deep, covers and completely conceals your poke; you then raise it as quickly as possible, and so densely packed are they that they have no time to escape. You are rewarded with perhaps a bushel of fish. In this very simple way I have boated from twelve to twenty barrels of sillacks in a very short time. It is a great godsend to the people when on the approach of winter a "steethe" of sillacks "sets in" in this way. But, contrary to what might be expected, they cannot be calculated upon to make an annual appearance; nor do they show anything like the same regard to punctuality as do migratory birds. They come, sometimes early, sometimes late, in winter. It is impossible to account for this capriciousness. Moreover, these shoals affect some voes, as Baltasound, greatly in preference to others, and for no reason that is apparent. However, plenty of sillacks can generally be caught anywhere and everywhere from the rocks or along the shores in sheltered places during the winter months.

As spring advances the sillacks draw off to deeper water and disperse, still however keeping on the coast,

and mostly pretty close to the rocks and by the tide-ways. So soon as they have had "three drinks of the May flood," as the phrase is, that is on the second of May, they enter upon their next stage of life, and become "piltacks." During the summer they grow very rapidly, get fat and greatly improve in flavour. The colour of the flesh is rather grey. Hence the saithe in all its stages is called "grey fish," while the ling, cod, and tusk are called "white fish."

The mode of fishing the piltacks during the summer and autumn months is somewhat different from that of the sillack fishing just described. The rods and tackle are similar, only a little stronger. One man rows your boat slowly along the shore, by the tideways, round skerries and sunken rocks, backwards and forwards, while the fishers, each with two rods, trawl their lines astern. The haft of your rod, which is not round but slightly flattened, rests along your thigh from the joint to the knee. While you are unhooking the captives from one line, the eager piltacks are tug-tugging at your other line, which you don't attempt to raise until the first is discharged and dropt into the water. It requires some practice and dexterity to avoid entangling your lines. When the piltacks are taking well you are kept as busy as possible hauling them in two or three at a time. I have myself in three hours "drawn"—that is the phrase for fishing sillacks and piltacks—900 piltacks, which in August might weigh 150 or 160 pounds. Piltacks are also fished with bait—"leepit" limpets being the only

bait ever used. "Leepit" means scalded with boiling water till the flesh leaves the shell quite readily. This fishing of piltacks, either with fly or bait, prosecuted in the evening or early morning, is termed "The Eela."

You may think it poor sport and little to be compared with trout fishing. I shan't argue the point. I always regarded it as capital sport. It is true it does not require the same tender delicacy of hand and eye as trout fishing. But on the other hand you seldom fail to get a good basket, and that is more than can be said to be your general experience if you are a trout fisher. There is considerable satisfaction in coming home from an evening at the Eela with several hundred delicious fish. You feel that you have fairly earned your supper, and done something in the way of contributing to the food supplies of the household. But I could never feel any satisfaction on wending my way back from a day's angling for trout, when, as often occurred, my basket was empty. And I have never been able to regard it as great sport, when the only result and reward of lashing away most diligently in every likely pool, and trying all sorts of flies, for hours, was "one glorious nibble!" Moreover, few streams or lochs anywhere can produce trout for one moment to be compared with piltacks in richness and piquancy of flavour. Returning from the Eela on a fine summer night with a good haul, a score or so of your newly caught piltacks are gutted, beheaded, and plunged into boiling sea-water with a handful of salt

added. Shetlanders, I may observe in passing, always consider sea-water the proper thing in which to boil fresh fish of every description, and potatoes also; and they are right. In five minutes the piltacks are cooked and served, not omitting to have a cupful of the water in which they are boiled poured over them. And if you don't make a supper fit for a prince, there's something radically wrong about your appetite or constitution, and you should consult the doctor without a moment's delay! Next morning at breakfast you will attack the piltacks with no less vigour and satisfaction. Some people prefer them cold. I do, and I think the peculiar oysterish flavour comes out more fully in the cold state. I have just mentioned the oyster flavour of this fish. And here, be it known to those who are unacquainted with the fact, that piltack soup is in taste very similar to, and will not fear comparison with, the best that can be made from the illustrious bivalve. Hung up for a few days, sun-dried, and then boiled—or better still, brandered—piltacks are delicious. Also large quantities of them are put in pickle for a day or two, and then dried and stored. They will keep for months, and nothing in the shape of salt or pickled fish can be finer. As I have said, this fish is most wholesome and nutritious, and forms a staple and invaluable article of food in every Shetland household. Shetlanders would indeed many a time be badly off were it not for the bountiful supplies of sillacks and piltacks which are almost always within easy reach simply for the "drawing."

But to return to our expedition to Muness and our day at the Eela there.

A full hour before dawn of the short winter day we started in the *Blanche*, a fine "fourareen"—four-oared-boat,—belonging to my uncle, with whom she was, on account of her grand rowing and sea-boat qualities and general handiness, a great favourite, when he went seal-hunting. The morning was fine, the sea smooth, and only a light breeze blowing from the south, therefore directly contrary: so we rowed to our destination. The day was spent in fishing. The piltacks, at this season large and fat, were taking splendidly, and we made a great haul. But as the afternoon advanced the wind rather suddenly shifted to the south-east, and greatly increased: the sky got overcast, and threatened what seamen call "dirty weather:" the sea also rose rapidly. We began to consult about returning; but after due deliberation it was deemed advisable to linger a little to see if we were really going to have a storm or only a temporary squall. Another boat had come from Baltasound in the morning when we did, and was fishing close beside us. Her skipper, Tammy Johnstone, an active, energetic young fisherman, but with the reputation of being sometimes very foolhardy, hailed us—"Don't you think we should be running for home?" Cautious Peter, who was very weather-wise, replied—"We are going to wait half-an-hour longer. By that time we shall see if it will be safe. I don't like the look of that black sky. It may come to nothing after all: but it will be wise not to

be in a hurry." "Well," cried Tammy, "I thought we might have gone back to Baltasound in company. I don't care to be storm-stayed here; I want to get home, and I think we can manage it before the weather gets very bad: so we're off: good evening. Give her sail, lads"—he added, taking the helm and sheet, while his brother at once hauled up the closely-reefed sail; and away before the rapidly rising gale flew the buoyant little boat like a racer. Peter shook his head, glanced at the lowering sky, and muttered, "They are reckless fools." And so we were afterwards told did Tammy and his crew themselves think before they reached the shelter of Baltasound. The wind and sea continued to rise. The whole coast from Muness to the south entrance to Baltasound is rocky and exposed to the full fury of the North Sea. There was no shelter, no landing place, to which the boat could run. Baltasound was the nearest haven of safety. Tammy's boat was several times nearly filled with water, and nothing but admirable seamanship could have saved them. They were glad enough and very thankful when they rounded the point of Skeotaing and found themselves in smooth water.

Meantime we had come to the conclusion, at least Peter had, that it would be madness to attempt the passage. As evening approached snow began to fall and the wind blew a fierce gale. So we landed at Muness and drew up our boat high on the beach. A well-to-do fisherman, who, in virtue of considerable savings he was known to have at his credit in the

bank, and of his house being more roomy and comfortable than the cottages of his neighbours, was a sort of big-wig—"boss" our American cousins would call him—amongst the Muness folk, hospitably invited us to his house. "You can't attempt to cross the hills to Baltasound to-night: come with me. You won't expect fine fare or fine lodgings. But we'll find something for you, though it may be plain. And the wife keeps a tidy house, and will give you a hearty welcome." We were too glad of any shelter to be in the least particular: but in truth there was no occasion for James's apologies. While we were securing our boat and piltacks, he despatched a messenger to inform the gudewife what guests she would have for the night. So when we arrived we found a blazing peat-fire both "but" and "ben," and sundry preparations actively going on for a repast. James's comely wife met us at the door with a bright smile and kindly welcome, "Come awa', come awa'," she said to me. I'm blithe blithe ta see ony bairn o' the doctor's. Bliss him! if it hadna been for him, when I was sae ill and thocht I wis deein', I wid hae been lying i' the kirkyaird lang sin syne." Very soon, with the keenest of keen appetites, we were doing ample justice to excellent ham and egg, beautiful oatmeal-cakes, flour scones, and butter, and tea such as Shetlanders know well—none better—how to brew. What more could we desire? In due time supper followed, consisting of piltacks and fine mealy potatoes. By way of nightcap the men had a decorous dram to finish off with. I was a teetotaler—indeed in

accordance with our father's wishes and advice all his children were teetotalers, although not pledged disciples of Father Matthew, until we reached our majority. So I had what was far better than a dram, some delicious milk, which was more than half cream. Don't believe a word about fish and milk being an incongruous mixture. I never found them in the very least inharmonious. Charlie and Magnie had a shakedown in the snug little barn. I had the offer of a box-bed all to myself, but I magnanimously resigned it to Peter, and elected to occupy a capacious arm chair by the fireside. Wrapped in my ample old plaid, I never slept more soundly or comfortably.

A snow storm raged all that night and all next day. It was utterly out of the question to return home by sea, and almost as impossible to cross the barren roadless hills to Baltasound. So we spent the day in gutting and curing our piltacks. On the third day, the storm having then considerably abated, we made our way home by land, but it was ten days before we could return for our boat and fish.

As a general rule the Eela is attended with very little danger, but on one occasion I had an experience which very closely bordered on being dangerous.

It was a fine summer morning early, that is about three o'clock, when Magnie and I started in my little pleasure boat, the *Marie*, for Hoonie, a small island close to the mainland of Unst on the east side, and distant about a mile south-west from the south point of Balta island, already described. Our purpose was to have a

morning at the Eela round Hoonie, and afterwards a few hours' rabbit shooting in Balta, where there were great numbers of Kiûnnins—Shetlandic for rabbits. The morning was perfectly calm but rather misty. After three hours' fishing we started to row across the sound to Balta. When about midway the mist got very dense, and we entirely lost sight of land on both sides. Still we rowed on, keeping as we thought a straight course. But we soon discovered that we had not done so, for we failed to reach land after rowing as we knew much further than the distance across. Then we tried a spell first in one direction, then in another, but with no better success. Plainly we had lost our way and had no idea of our bearings. What was to be done? We knew it was little use rowing at random, for as likely as not we should only be increasing our distance from the land, perhaps rowing right out into the ocean. So we came to the conclusion that the best thing to do was to do nothing. One attempt we made to ascertain the direction of the nearest land, which for aught we knew might be within a stone's-throw of us. My dear and faithful companion, old Slop, as usual, accompanied us, and it occurred to me if we were at all near any land, his instinct might point out the direction. So I told him to jump overboard, which he was at all times very willing to do. Then I ordered, "Go ashore, Slop, ashore at once." He swam out a little, our hopes revived, and we instantly prepared to follow his lead. But then he hesitated. "Ashore, go ashore," I shouted. He always knew what that meant, and seemed

perfectly to understand what was wanted, for he raised his head, turned round first in one direction, then in another, and swam about anyhow, sniffing the air vigorously, but evidently undecided. Then he turned and swam back to the boat. Plainly he was as much at fault as we were; but his failure led us to the conclusion that probably we were a considerable distance from land. Nothing for it but patience: so we lay thus for many hours in enforced inactivity, except that we knocked over a few cormorants that came sailing past and looming in the thick mist like huge black dragons. About noon a brisk breeze from the west sprang up, the mist rose and was dispersed, and then we discovered that the south tide had carried us to the south-east, some four or five miles right to seaward. At once we hoisted our sail and attempted to beat up to the land, the wind being directly offshore. But the tide was also against us, and we soon found we could make no way to windward. Moreover, in a very little the wind freshened and became too strong for us to carry sail; and we were equally unsuccessful with the oars. Here was a pretty fix! We were drifting away out into the North Sea, the nearest land to leeward being the coast of Norway. But it might have been worse, for fortunately the sea was smooth, and we philosophically came to the conclusion it would be a senseless thing to exhaust our strength in manifestly unavailing efforts. In this emergency I bethought me of a device which I had often heard my father recommend to the fishermen when they might find

themselves in somewhat similar circumstances, viz., to extemporise a species of half-floating anchor. At each of two corners of the sail I tied a stone of no great weight, but together sufficient to sink it under water, and pitched it overboard, the sheets and halyards serving for cable. The result was highly gratifying. The bows of our skiff at once headed the wind, and the weighted sail, a couple of fathoms or so under water, acted as a most efficient drag upon the boat, and greatly retarded her driftiug. Still we knew of course that we were drifting, although, now slowly, seaward. But we also knew that such summer breezes from the west, not amounting to gales, were commonly of brief duration and almost always fell with the approach of evening, so we did not a bit lose heart; we were in no danger as things were.

By this time we had got exceedingly hungry, but as the afternoon advanced we became ravenously so. At last Magnie—who was a bright smart lad about my own age, and a great chum of mine, always ready to take part in any expedition or adventure that might be proposed—gave expression to his sensations: "I wish we had something to eat. I'm just famishing—I do believe I could eat some of those piltacks raw." "Surely we can do better than that," I answered; "let us try to get up a fire and roast some: we have got nothing else to do in the meantime." No sooner said than done. "Necessity is the mother of invention," says the proverb. At once we set to work. A foot of our painter rope was cut off and

teased into oakum. One of the tilfers—loose flooring of the boat—was confiscated and split up with our pocket knives. Some of the stones which served as ballast, were arranged so as to form a little hollow stove. A blank shot of powder—for we had no matches—set the oakum in a blaze, and very soon we had a capital little fire. The iron tholes did duty for a brand iron. A pile of piltacks were gutted and laid over the glowing embers, and in a very few minutes were beautifully cooked. The number consumed, Slop of course heartily assisting us, was something prodigious. And never was a meal more thoroughly relished. It was breakfast, dinner, and tea all rolled into one great feast, after which we felt so refreshed and strengthened that we did not seem to mind a bit though we should have to spend the night rocking on the billows of the German Ocean. We were not, however, reduced to the necessity of passing through so severe an ordeal. As we had anticipated the wind fell with the approach of evening, and we reached land and home late at night without any further misadventure, and to the great joy of anxious hearts who had got seriously alarmed at our non-appearance; for although we sometimes spent a whole day "from early morn to dewy eve" on our sporting expeditions, our absence had never before been so unconscionably prolonged.

# *OSLA'S WEDDING.*

## CHAPTER I.

To one whose memory can go back half a century or thereby, and who knows what Shetland then was, that period seems fairly to merit being called 'the olden time.' These remote islands of the northern sea were then almost completely isolated from intercourse with the busy world, and little known. Most people had a hazy idea of their being in some way connected with Skye or the outer Hebrides! Scarcely any tourists ever thought of visiting them, and for the very good reason, that if any venturesome explorer succeeded in penetrating so far into the wild and stormy north, the chances were he would become an involuntary prisoner, and it would be weeks, or possibly months, before he got an opportunity of finding his way back again. Mails were brought from the south at irregular intervals by a small sloop, which made six or seven voyages in the year from the Scotch coast. A letter sometimes took two or three months to reach its destination in Edinburgh or London. There were no roads, and of course no

wheeled vehicles—scarcely even a cart—anywhere. The only interinsular communication was by small open boat, when occasion required. The hardy, stout-hearted islanders—descendants of the grand old Norse vikings—plied their dangerous avocation of fishermen in their tiny undecked six-oared boats during the three months of summer, and drew from ocean's depths their precarious but on the whole not insufficient subsistence. There was scarcely any trade, properly so called; almost the only exports were dried salt fish, oil, kelp, a little butter, and the coarser kinds of hosiery; and the imports were, salt, wood for boat-building, a few cargoes of coal, a very moderate quantity of meal in bad seasons, and groceries. Very few ships of any kind were, therefore, ever seen amongst the islands. Occasionally, a storm-tossed bark or brig, short of provisions, would seek shelter and replenishing of her exhausted stores in some land-locked *voe;* or a Dutch fishing-buss slip in, to disburden herself of a few hundred pounds of tobacco and a few kegs of gin, without leave or fear of His Majesty's Custom-house authorities.

Now-a-days, regular communication is kept up between Leith and Lerwick by large powerful steamers, thrice a week in summer, and twice a week in winter; and between Lerwick and the north isles of Shetland by a good-sized steamer twice a week in summer, and once in winter; and telegraph wires connect the south with Lerwick, and reach as far north as Haroldswick, in Unst. There are now excellent

roads from end to end of the principal island, called Mainland, and across the islands of Yell and Unst. Gigs and phaetons and other wheeled vehicles are numerous; even bicycles and tricycles are occasionally to be seen; and crowds of tourists annually visit the islands. Within the last few years, fleets of fishing-vessels and many thousands of fishermen, fish-curers, coopers, and gippers, from Fraserburgh, Peterhead, the Isle of Man, and Ireland, spend six months of the year on the coast, vigorously prosecuting the ling and herring fishings. Large curing-stations, landing-stages, jetties, warehouses, and fishermen's cottages have been erected all round the coast, chiefly at Lerwick, Scalloway, Whalsay, Mid Yell, Uyea Sound, and Baltasound. Great numbers of steamers and sailing-vessels are constantly coming and going. Cargoes of ice are brought from Norway. Large quantities of fresh fish, kippered herrings, and smoked haddocks are forwarded to the southern markets, besides dried ling and cod and salt herring.

Half a century ago, agriculture was carried on in the most primitive fashion. The fisherman-crofter turned over the soil with a small spade, and covered the seed with a rude harrow of his own making—a light square of wood, into which a few big nails were driven—which he himself or some member of his family drew over the fields with a rope. The prices of all native commodities were ridiculously low. You could purchase a good pony or cow at from twenty to forty shillings; a good sheep of the

native breed at from two to four shillings; and a lamb as low as one shilling, or even less. Geese were from eightpence to tenpence each; chickens and fowls from fourpence to tenpence a pair; and eggs three-halfpence to twopence a dozen. Now, there are in the islands many good-sized arable and sheep farms, cultivated and managed according to the Scotch system. Excellent crops of turnips, oats, bear, and hay are raised; improved breeds of store cattle and sheep have been introduced, and large numbers are annually exported, and fetch prices in the southern markets equal to those of animals of their class bred and reared in any other part of Scotland; and the prices of other articles above mentioned have risen proportionally since those markets have become accessible. A man's wages used to be tenpence to one shilling a day, and a woman's fourpence to sixpence; and the wages of domestic servants were twenty-five to thirty shillings a year. Now they all approximate to those in the south.

Further, many of the old, and in some respects very peculiar social customs, which had come down from the remote times before the islands were annexed to the Scottish crown, have passed, or are fast passing away. Altogether, modern enterprise and material progress have nowhere made more rapid advancement or effected more striking changes than in those "melancholy isles of furthest Thule."

Osla Manson was an exceedingly pretty, bright, blue-

eyed girl, the eldest daughter of Magnus Anderson, an active, well-to-do fisherman. All his children were, of course, Mansons.* When about fourteen years of age, Osla had come to our house in the capacity of a little nursemaid, but as she grew older, had been promoted to be housemaid; and a tidy, clever, faithful servant she had proved, greatly liked and trusted, as she well deserved to be, by all our family. She had not a few suitors amongst the young fishermen; but although many of them were regarded as quite eligible, she was in no hurry to enter into the state of matrimony. She was decidedly fastidious, and just a little bit coquettish, and the young fellows found that her heart and hand were not to be won quite so easily as perhaps they had imagined. Amongst her numerous lovers, she greatly preferred Ned Winwick; nay, she did not deny that she even liked him, but said she did not think she liked him well enough to marry him, and so, without point-blank repulsing his suit, she had always put him off with one excuse or another. When Ned was a boy of twelve, his father had been drowned in Davis Strait. His widowed mother and her six children,

* Fifty years ago the ancient custom of Shetland in regard to the use of patronymics was still quite common, although not universal. Children did not usually adopt their father's surname, but his *Christian* name converted into a surname. Thus all the children of Henry Thomson would be Hendersons; and supposing *their* Christian names to be James, Andrew, Magnus, Peter, Bartel, their children in turn would be Jamesons, Andersons, Mansons, Petersons, or Bartelsons. This old custom has now almost entirely disappeared. It may be added that married women very rarely took their husband's surname, but bore to the end of their days their own maiden name.

of whom Ned was the eldest, had, by the kindness of the laird, been allowed to remain in their croft at little more than a nominal rent, paid from some small savings left by the poor drowned sailor. The neighbours —always remarkably kind and helpful to widows and orphans whom a sudden calamity at sea had bereft of their breadwinner—assisted to cultivate the little fields of oats and potatoes, and liberally supplied the family with fish. Ned was employed as a "beach-boy" in the work of curing and drying fish during the summer months; and in winter he was very active in catching piltacks and sillacks, which, as already stated, swarm in the bays and along the coast everywhere, and are most wholesome and nutritious food. And so the family struggled on bravely, till Ned was old enough to be taken as a junior hand in a fishing-boat. He had then grown to be a big, strong, active lad, bright and obliging, and a great favourite with every one. His goodness and devotion to his mother and the younger members of the family, to whom he became principal breadwinner, won for him universal sympathy and admiration; and so it happened that at an unusually early age he became skipper of a fishing-boat, and one of the most enterprising and successful fishermen in the island. At the time our little story commences, Ned was twenty-five years of age, and his sweetheart, Osla, twenty-two.

One morning, all the fishing-boats, after hauling their lines, had been overtaken far out at sea by a violent storm. Osla's father's boat and Ned's were in close

proximity, when, with close-reefed sails—Anderson's boat leading—they bore up for the land. Suddenly, when on the crest of a mighty wave, a fiercer blast than usual struck the foremost boat; mast and sail went by the board, and the next wave swept over her with resistless fury. Ned saw it all.

"Ready to lower away the sail, Jamie," he cried to the second hand, who held the halyard; "and you, lads, stand by your oars."

"It's useless, Ned," said Jamie; "we can't save any of them; and to stop in such a storm and sea is madness."

"For your life! do as I tell you, all; it may be our turn to-morrow," said the intrepid and noble-hearted young skipper sternly, and with a gleam in his eye that meant he *would* be obeyed. In a moment more they could see the swamped boat bottom up, with one man, whom they readily recognised to be Osla's father, holding on for dear life to the keel. Instantly, Ned put down his helm, and his buoyant little skiff luffed up and breasted the sea gallantly not more than a hundred yards right to windward of the wreck.

"Haul down, Jamie," shouted Ned. "And you, lads, keep her head in the wind's eye.—Now, Jamie!" he added as soon as the sail was gathered in, "the livers! Crop some livers. Quick, quick!"

His orders were promptly obeyed. Jamie's ready knife ripped up several of the newly caught ling; the livers were torn out, crushed in his hand, and thrown overboard on all sides; and the great waves became

smooth and their high crests ceased so break. Meantime, Ned seized one of the fishing-buoys—an inflated sheepskin, to which a long line was attached—and threw it overboard. The tearing wind carried the light messenger on its errand of rescue fast to leeward. The poor castaway apprehended the situation at a glance, caught the buoy, which was skilfully guided to his very hand, gave two turns and a hitch of the line round his arms, lest he should lose consciousness—for, like most Shetland fishermen, he could not swim a stroke—and the next instant he was being hauled through the water, and was soon on board Ned's boat. He was the only man of the ill-fated crew that was saved; the others had disappeared beneath the waves. Ned set sail once more, and reached land in safety.

Strange to say, he did not pay Osla a visit for more than a fortnight after this, and when at last he did come, she reproached him gently. "Why didn't you come to see me all this time, Ned? I wanted so much to thank you for your brave conduct in saving my father's life yon dreadful morning. The whole island is ringing with it."

"I didn't want you to thank me," Ned replied. "I did no more than Magnus would have done for me, if I had been in his place and he in mine."

Then Osla broke down, and sobbed in an incoherent half-hysterical manner, a very natural and pardonable proceeding on her part, in the circumstances, but one which Ned did not understand; but, brave lad as he was, he was also very soft-hearted, and Osla's tears

made him feel very sorry for her and very unhappy; so he did his best, in a kind, manly way, to soothe her, and not without success; and somehow, before they parted they had discovered and acknowledged that they were very dear to each other. Shortly after this, it was all settled that as soon as the proper season arrived, they should be married. The proper season is the dead of winter, and very seldom does a Shetland marriage take place at any other time of the year.

Osla with many tears gave her mistress notice, protesting she would not have left for any one but Ned; but he was such a dear lad, the best and bravest and bonniest lad in the island, and had saved her father's life at the risk of his own, she couldn't do otherwise than marry him when he had asked her and said it would make him so happy; and she hoped her mistress, who had always been so kind to her, would not think her ungrateful. Of course her mistress told her she was doing quite the right thing. Osla returned to her father's house at the term, and the wedding was fixed to take place about Yule-time.

The "wedding-needs," as the humble trousseau of a Shetland bride is called, had, according to the invariable practice, unless amongst the very poorest, to be fetched from Lerwick, the little metropolis of the islands, a distance of fifty miles. The custom was for the bride and bridegroom, accompanied by a married female relative of the bride's, to go to Lerwick by boat to make the necessary purchases. There was never any lack of neighbours ready to man the boat at no charge

to the happy couple. It was always the slack season of the year. Little or nothing was doing, and the young fellows regarded it as a very pleasant trip, and an honour to escort a bride and bridegroom on such an errand. Sometimes several couples would club together and go in one boat. Usually they would be about a week or ten days away ; but sometimes, if the weather was boisterous—by no means a rare occurrence in those high latitudes and in the dead of winter—they would be detained two or three weeks. Often, if the wind were contrary, the passage to or from Lerwick could not be made in one day ; and I have known a bridal party compelled by stress of weather to land in some *voe* half-way, and there to remain storm-stayed for several days. These, however, were by no means unpleasant contretemps, but rather the reverse. The voyagers were always kindly received and hospitably entertained. Little festive gatherings would be extemporised in honour of the involuntary guests, and nothing in the way of payment was expected ; indeed, it would have been regarded as an affront little short of an insult to have offered it.

Towards the end of December, Ned's boat was launched from the "Noost"—her snug winter-quarters behind the beach. The party consisted of Ned, Osla, a married aunt of hers—sister of her mother, said aunt's husband, and four young fishermen. Osla and her aunt—the latter swelling with importance, and even solemn, under a consciousness of the tremendous responsibility which, at Osla's earnest request, but with

some slight show of reluctance, she had undertaken—were snugly and comfortably ensconced in the stern-sheets amongst abundance of straw; and amid the ringing cheers and good wishes of a crowd of friends and neighbours, who gathered on the beach to see them off, they set sail for Lerwick. The voyage was prosperous, and in ten days the party returned. Immediately thereafter, preparations and arrangements for the wedding commenced. Osla's father was the younger son of a small udaller, and was not a little proud of it. He was also a thoroughgoing and uncompromising conservative, and a great stickler for all the old customs which had come down from his Scandinavian forebears. He was determined, therefore, that on this auspicious occasion everything should be conducted in what he regarded as strictly proper form. "My bairn," said he, "is a guid lass and a bonny, and nane shall hae it to say her wedding was a puir or shabby ane. She is marryin' a lad worthy o' her; an' it's no me that'll haud back frae' shawin' a' kindness and honour to my dochter and the man that saved my life."

The reader will understand, therefore, that what follows is the description of a Shetland wedding as it used to be kept half a century ago amongst well-to-do fishermen.

## CHAPTER II.

THURSDAY is invariably the wedding-day in Shetland—at least it used to be—and the previous Saturday is called the "contract" day, when there are some mild festivities at the house of the bride's father. In the afternoon of this day, Ned and his best man proceeded to the session clerk to give in the names for due proclamation of banns on Sunday, returning to Magnus's house, where a few mutual friends, mostly relations, met and spent some pleasant hours in the evening, but without encroaching on the sanctity of the day of rest. Although the term "contract" was applied to these Saturday proceedings as a whole, there was never anything of the nature of a marriage-contract, as usually understood; but these preliminaries were regarded as a sort of public and formal betrothal, almost amounting in themselves to a marriage.

On Sunday, due proclamation was made, as always, immediately before divine service commenced; and if any person or persons had any objections why these two, Edward Winwick and Osla Manson, should not be lawfully joined together in matrimony, they were then and there challenged to declare the same, or for ever after hold their peace. A few minutes afterwards, when the service had fairly begun—for it would have been considered very unseemly and unlucky to be present while the proclamation was being made, and dreadfully bad form not to have been in church at all

—Ned and his best man appeared in church, each carrying—as always a *sine quâ non* on such occasions, no matter what the state of the weather—an enormous brand-new cotton umbrella. Osla of course remained at her father's house, to which the two lads repaired after service, and had dinner, returning to their own homes at very proper hours.

On Monday morning the bridegroom arrived at the bride's home; and the pair, as the custom was, sallied forth arm in arm to bid the guests to the wedding. In this part of the proceedings, if to the invitation it was added that it was to be a "free wedding," that was regarded as the handsome and liberal thing, and meant that the bride's father provided everything for the entertainment. But if nothing of the sort was said, then it was expected, and quite understood, that the young men—only the young and unmarried men—would bring with them each a bottle of whisky. Need it be said that in Osla's case the invitation was to a "free wedding."

On Thursday before daybreak, the unmarried contingent of the wedding guests assembled at Magnus's snug cottage, where they had breakfast, and thereafter proceeded to the church. With the exception of a single couple, who were technically the "married man" and "married woman"—the former a relative of the bride, the latter of the bridegroom, but never any of the parents of either—only the young people, lads and lasses, ever went to church on these occasions. On the way thither the "married man" led the bride, and

the bridegroom took the "married woman." Returning, the bridegroom of course took his wife, and the married man and married woman marched in company; and all the others going and returning—always arm-in-arm—were coupled according to their choice or predilections; but once paired, as they were on starting for church, each lad stuck to his lass as his special charge throughout the whole festivities with the most praiseworthy devotion and constancy, very rarely even dancing with any one else. A younger brother of Osla's acted as "gunner," always an important official on such occasions. Armed with an old flint-lock musket, he kept blazing away blank shots at intervals as the company tramped merrily over the roadless hills. Arrived at the church, the musket was left outside at the door, and the party trooped in and took their places in front of the communion table, where the minister was already waiting. The simple ceremony over, the bridegroom and best man pulled out their brand-new snuff-boxes and handed them round, first of all to the minister. Also the best man produced and handed to the girls a second box filled with very minute caraway comfits, into which each lass gingerly dipped the tip of her tongue, and abstracted for her delectation whatever of the contents might chance to stick thereto. It would have been contrary to all immemorial precedent not to have been provided with these snuff and comfit boxes. Then a whisky-bottle was produced and the health of the newly married couple drunk. A Shetland bride's gown

was almost always of cobourg, grey, brown, or purple. Osla had chosen sober grey. A light cream-coloured shawl round her shoulders, a large net cap, busked with an enormous quantity of narrow ribbons of all shades of colour, like a gaudy floral crown, white woollen home-made stockings, and low leather shoes, completed her attire. Anything in the shape of a bonnet would have been utterly out of place, and never formed part of the get-up of a Shetland bride.

The parish school stood at a short distance from the church, and the boys, as usual on such occasions, had asked and obtained a half-holiday to see the wedding-party. Emerging from the church, the gay company was saluted with vociferous cheers. The gunner fired off his piece in acknowledgment; the biggest schoolboy sent a football high in the air; and round and round the wedding-party, for a mile or two of the walk homeward, the urchins kept up the ball-playing, racing and shouting like mad. The correct thing was for the bridegroom to give a new football to the schoolboys or a shilling in lieu of one. If the latter, it was at once presented to the bride, and the greatest care was then taken that the old ball should be kept going, but never fall amongst the company. But if the niggardly bridegroom failed in this customary courtesy of a new ball or shilling, the inevitable consequence was that the ball was mercilessly and persistently played amongst the party, to the great damage of the girls' fineries. Ned, popular

with every one, and of a most kindly and sympathetic nature, not only gave the shilling, but presented a new ball as well, which he had himself made a few days previously. His best-man carried it in his pocket, of course in a perfectly limp condition; but as soon as the party had fairly started from the church, he inflated it to its full dimensions from a pair of lusty lungs, and handed it to the bridegroom. Ned then stepped forward, and with one vigorous kick sent the ball high aloft and amongst the delighted boys, who rent the air with exultant shouts: "Hurrah for the bride and bridegroom! Good-luck to them. Hurrah, hurrah!"

Meantime the married friends and neighbours who had been invited had assembled at Magnus's house. These, headed by the bride's father and mother, met the newly married couple, and the young people their attendants, on their arrival from church. The bride's mother stepped forward with the bridescake—a large oatmeal cake, baked with butter, sugar, and caraway seeds. This she broke over the bride's head before crossing the threshold, and distributed amongst the guests; the father meanwhile handing drams all round. Healths were drunk according to the invariable formula: "Here's to the bride and bridegroom and company."

Dinner speedily followed. A Shetland fisherman's cottage usually consists of two apartments, the "but-end," or kitchen, where all the family live and take their meals, and where the older children sleep; and

the "ben-end," where the heads of the family and any young children there may be sleep in the two "box-beds" against the wall. Magnus's house, as became an udaller's son, was provided with an additional small room. Dinner was a most substantial, I should say ponderous affair. The good things consisted of barley-broth, smoked mutton, pork ham, fresh and smoked geese, all boiled—nothing was ever roasted—oatmeal cakes, bearmeal bannocks, "burstin brünies," and a few biscuits. Neither fish of any kind nor potatoes were ever produced at a wedding. (I should explain, for the benefit of the uninitiated reader, that "burstin" is a kind of meal made from oats or bear—the latter a coarse kind of barley—highly dried in a kettle over the fire and ground very fine in a handmill; and "burstin brünies" are round thick cakes made of this meal, with or without the addition of butter, and baked on a gridiron over a peat fire.)

The arrangement of the guests was peculiar, but strictly according to custom. Dinner was served to those who had been at church in the but-end. About the middle of the table on one side—for there was no head or foot—sat the "married man," bridegroom, best-man, and general company of young men; on the opposite side sat the "married woman," bride, best-maid, and general company of unmarried women. "The auld folk"—as all the married guests were irreverently called—had dinner in the ben-end, and all were served by Magnus and his wife. Drams were occasionally

handed round, and sparingly partaken of; indeed, there was nothing approaching to the slightest excess throughout the wedding festivities. But Shetlanders, I am proud to say, have always been an eminently temperate people; and at the many weddings I have been a guest, I have never seen any one forget himself by over-indulgence in drink.

Dinner over, the tables and their contents were quickly cleared away, the floor swept, and dancing commenced in the but-end. Frædie, the best fiddler in the island—and as I have said when discoursing of "Yule time" a first-rate one he was, genial withal, a prime favourite, and always in great request at weddings or other merrymakings—had, as a matter of course, been invited. On the top of a huge seaman's chest in a corner, a chair was set, and here Frædie took his place. Before commencing the hot and highly fatiguing work of the evening, the men disencumbered themselves of their coats, and the ball began with what is termed a "sixum reel," which is made up of three couples. This is always the most common and popular dance amongst Shetlanders. The figure of the reel is somewhat peculiar, but simple and graceful. As to proper "steps," when the dancers set to their partners, they were conspicuous by their absence; each dancer had a style and steps of his or her own. Sixum, foursum, and threesum reels, and an occasional country-dance, were engaged in with unflagging energy and enthusiasm till tea-time. Round-dances were utterly unknown. Tea was served about seven

o'clock, and then dancing was renewed with no diminution of spirit.

About nine o'clock a distant shot was heard. "Grülacks!" (Shetlandic for guisers or maskers) "Grülacks!" was the cry; and the dance in progress was instantly stopped in mid career. The gunner flew for his old musket and fired off the shot of welcome, without which the grülacks would not have approached the house. Presently six men entered, clad in most fantastic garb, which thoroughly disguised them. Some wore a rude straw tunic, reaching to the knee; some a short petticoat; each had a white or striped cotton shirt over his coat; and a gigantic high-peaked straw-hat, liberally trimmed with festoons of narrow ribbon of various colours, adorned his head; while a thin handkerchief concealed his face, but did not blindfold him; and in his hand he carried a stout stick at least four feet long. The Skudler, or chief of the band of grülacks, is distinguished from the others by the more gaudy and elaborate decorations of his head-dress. Welcomed by the friendly shot, these strangely-attired maskers stepped boldly forward and appropriated the middle space of the kitchen floor, flourishing their sticks and striking the floor with them, and snorting and grunting in a manner peculiar to grülacks and pigs, but saying never a word. Presently, Frædie struck up the lively strains of the "Foola Reel," and they danced, first by themselves, and then for an hour with the girls. Then they discovered themselves, had some very substantial refreshments, and departed.

All weddings were not graced by a visit of grülacks. It was meant as a very special mark of honour and respect. About midnight the guests had supper; and then the married portion of the company sped their way to their respective homes, but the young people kept up the dancing for two or three hours longer.

The time for bidding the bride good-night had now arrived, and as each young man stepped forward to offer his felicitations, he pulled out his purse, and in the most ostentatious manner presented her with a small sum of money varying from one to three shillings. These were the only marriage presents going, or usual on similar occasions, and they were always graciously accepted. It would have been regarded as an affront to refuse.

It might be supposed that now the wedding-party would finally separate. By no means. The correct thing in those days was to keep up the festivities till Saturday night, and Magnus Anderson was the last man in the island to depart one jot from old custom. Accordingly, accommodation was provided for the young people who had come from any considerable distance; others went to their own homes; but all again put in an appearance at daybreak on Friday morning; and during this day and Saturday, the feasting and fun continued with unflagging spirit. The lads played games at football during the few hours of daylight, and the evenings were spent in dancing and games. On Saturday evening the wedding-party at last broke up; but all met again at church on Sunday,

when the newly married couple were "kirkit." Ned and Osla walked into the church arm-in-arm and took their places, supported by the entire wedding-party, the lads and lasses, however, in separate pews according to the custom of those days.

Ned and Osla still survive, a fine old couple, hale and hearty. Their married life has been happy and prosperous. They have brought up a large family of sons and daughters, most of whom are married. Their eldest son is the popular captain of a large steamer, whereat the "auld folk" are naturally not a little proud. Their grandchildren, too, are numerous; and Osla is full of hope that if her eldest daughter's daughter—who is also her own namesake, and has always been her special "pet lamb"—has the good sense to accept the steady, handsome fisher-lad who wants to make her his wife, she may live to be a great-grandmother.

# *INGATH'S VOOER.*

## CHAPTER I.

"AUNTIE has yielded at last, and Orgert is sold!"

"I am both glad and sorry to hear it."

"Poor Auntie! I think I can sympathise with her."

Speaker number one was the minister's wife; number two was his daughter; number three his son. The auntie to whom reference was made was the sister of Mrs. Nicolson, and a little part of the history of these two ladies must be told before you can understand the above remarks.

The sisters were early left orphans. Their father, an extravagant, somewhat "fast" man, wasted his substance after the manner of elderly prodigals. Consequently his daughters found themselves without any means of support beyond what they derived from a small bit of land attached to the old family mansion. The house and that strip of earth was all that remained of a goodly heritage; and bitterly did the sisters feel the difference in their position from that which the former ladies of Orgert had held in the Isle. Only the shadow of former prosperity, and the *noblesse oblige* of

race were left. For a number of years the pretty, pale sisters, last of their name and race, contrived, by a system of heart-breaking economy, to live on at Orgert; and few who met them elegantly dressed in laces and silk exhumed from family chests, and modernised in the secrecy of their bed-chambers, would have guessed that the high-bred Miss Ingath and the graceful Miss Osla daily knew what the extreme of poverty meant.

But though none would have *guessed* the truth, everybody in the Isle *knew* it.

Women whispered it to one another, and the whisper reached men's ears.

Few Shetland gentlemen can afford (or are too worldly-wise to dare) to marry portionless brides; therefore the ladies of Orgert passed their youth in single blessedness, though they were not without admirers.

As year followed year, and no one of all those "admirers" became a suitor in earnest, the less comely ladies of the Isle ceased to fear that Ingath and Osla would prove successful rivals, and a certain pity for the lonely sisters set in.

When the elder of the two reached twenty-five she began to show decided signs of old maidenism. Her features sharpened, and her speech became somewhat acrid. The marked dignity of her bearing developed into a stand-off style, which was by no means so attractive or "telling" as the fine hauteur of earlier days.

Now, as a rule the women of those favoured Isles do not begin to fade so soon as those in other countries,

and the decaying process is so very gradual as to be imperceptible; therefore Miss Ingath's changed appearance was widely commented upon.

If there had been the shadow of a suspicion that any man had been her suitor, folks would naturally have imputed her altered looks to a love disappointment; but her attitude towards every gentleman of her acquaintance was exactly what it had been always, so that there was no ground for supposing that any cause beyond the carking cares of poverty had aged Miss Ingath so soon and so markedly.

Not even her sister knew of an episode in Miss Ingath's life which would have been delicious food for the gossips if they had but dreamed of its occurrence. Whether that incident had affected her or not you may judge for yourselves, only I must expressly tell you that Miss Ingath was never *in love* during all her life.

There had been a sort of steward at Orgert in more prosperous times, and his wife had been nurse to both Ingath and Osla.

When the worthy couple's services were no longer required by the fallen house, they still continued to consider themselves bound to serve the indigent orphan girls; and when the factor and his wife were dead, their children kept up the old bond of fosterhood, and persisted in working for Ingath and Osla without dreaming of remuneration.

Of course the sisters would not permit such services to go unrewarded by anything more substantial than

thanks, and as cash was so scarce with them, a gift of meal or potatoes from the farm, or a garment from the defunct laird's wardrobe, had to do duty for payment. Such acts of kindness were received with the gratitude which humble retainers show when a master deigns to confer a favour; and never once did the faithful factotum or one of his family permit the ladies to dream that the boon conferred was in reality bestowed by the servants.

The servitors were well aware that their "puir ledies" were as poor, and more helpless, than any fisherman's children in the Isle, and a great pity stirred the honest hearts of the Harrisons.

Especially did Ole Harrison feel for his high-born foster sisters. He was younger than either of them, and had a lad's worship for the fair women who were so kind and benign, so lonely and unhappy. As he grew older his pity and his admiration grew into love.

The young fisherman, handsome, intelligent, fairly well educated, as well as come of an old Norne stock, saw no reason why an honest man's love should not be a welcome gift to a friendless and poverty-stricken young woman. It had become his habit since his father's death to give the ladies advice regarding the management of their bit of ground, their few sheep and ponies, and the like; and as every *manly* man feels himself to be in a sense the protector of every unprotected woman, he had insensibly assumed towards the sisters the attitude of one older, wiser, stronger than they.

His masculine superiority made him blind to the fact that women of twenty-five or thereabouts look upon men of twenty as "mere boys" when it comes to a question of love-making, though in other respects their manly attributes are acknowledged. Also Ole made a mighty mistake in fixing his affections upon the *elder* Miss Halcro. If he had been wise enough to choose Osla rather than her more dignified and less beautiful sister, it is possible that his suit might have prospered. But love has strange vagaries, and Ole's love lighted on the proud Ingath.

Only a woman bred in the belief that "blue blood" is next to godliness, can comprehend how the lady received Ole Harrison's frank proposal, couched in the warm words which sailors know how to use to their own advantage as a rule. Only a woman who has never known the pains and penalties of love could have answered it as cruelly as she did.

Unfortunately, the young man was impetuous and abrupt, as well as excessively demonstrative, and Miss Ingath was startled, as well as affronted, by his wooing. The sailor's winsome vocabulary was at a discount in this case, and Ole was dismissed with indignant scorn.

In disappointment and wrath he turned his back upon his native land, vowing never to set foot upon it again. He went to Australia—the Shetlanders' Elysium—and was soon lost to home and friends; and Miss Ingath strove to forget that a fisher lad had dared to cast love-lit eyes upon her aristocratic face.

But as the years went past, and no more eligible suitor presented himself, and people began to say that Ingath Halcro would never have "a lad o' her ain," she found herself thinking at rare times of Ole's warm words and tender glances. She knew that she had not loved him, and that she had considered herself insulted by his proposal, yet—so needful is love to a woman—she had a certain kind of pleasure in remembering that there had been one man in the world who had loved her dearly, and had coveted her love.

Gradually, as life began to look more dreary and desert-like before her, Miss Ingath reverted the oftener to that little bit of romance which was at once her pride and her shame; and if Ole Harrison had been alive and known it, he would have seen that a punishment for her heartless words and rejection of himself had fallen upon the proud lady of his worship.

A happier lot had fallen to the younger sister. A new minister had come to the Isle of Sweena, and he was a hot-hearted Highlander, who

> "Courted siller less than lore,
> And learnin' less than love."

In fact, counted world's gear less than all other sublunary treasures, and of all treasures he believed the love of a good woman to be the highest—the thing most to be desired.

This new minister saw no eyes so sweet as those of fair Osla Halcro among the many eyes lifted rever-

entially to his every Sunday. He found no lady teacher so patient with his dull scholars—no visiter so indefatigable in attendance upon the sick and the sad —no housewife so blythe and busy in spite of poverty —no woman in all his parish so like his ideal of a minister's wife; and so Mr. Nicolson wooed and won Miss Osla. He was brotherly enough to invite his wife's sister to make the manse her home; but Ingath could not endure the thought of leaving Orgert, and clung to its mouldering walls with a faithfulness that would have been sentimentally silly if it had not been pathetically earnest.

By-and-by boys and girls began to appear at the manse with that astounding rapidity which characterises the growth of clergymen's families, and the minister, having no means beyond his meagre stipend, did not often find it convenient to lay his hand on a five pound note. To be plain, Mr. Nicolson was often driven to his wit's end to know how to keep out of debt, and yet maintain his family according to their rank.

Now, it happened that an elderly and somewhat eccentric gentleman, desirous of leading a recluse life, and hearing that the Shetland Isles were very suitable as a home for such a person as himself, visited the Isle of Sweena, and immediately fixed his covetous eyes upon the old picturesque house of Orgert, standing quite away from all other dwellings, on a green ness almost surrounded by high cliffs and the sea.

The would-be hermit felt that no other spot on

earth could be so suitable for him, and he immediately instituted inquiries regarding its proprietor.

He found that the minister's wife and her sister were the joint possessors, and that both were in straitened circumstances; therefore it seemed reasonable to suppose that they would gladly exchange the ancient and almost ruined mansion, with its mere strip of land, for ready cash.

The eccentric stranger was liberal with his money, and was willing to give rather more for the place than the place was worth; but he had a great objection to treating directly with ladies upon any subject whatever.

He therefore opened negotiations with the minister, whose wife very willingly agreed to Mr. Nemo's proposal. Orgert was no good to her, she said, and if Ingath would consent, the manse should be her home.

Married ladies, whose elder unwedded sisters are forgetful at times of the altered position of both parties, will understand what a sacrifice of domestic sovereignty Mrs. Nicolson was prepared to make when she offered her sister a home. But a vision of "ready money" had risen before the anxious matron's eyes, and blotted out all other considerations.

With eager haste she informed Ingath of Mr. Nemo's liberal offer, and great was Osla's wrath to find that her sister would by no means agree to the sale of Orgert. Miss Halcro talked largely of the shame that had befallen their old name in that it was lost in themselves. The hereditary acres had vanished

with the men of the family, and was *she* to put the finishing stroke to the family disgrace by selling the old walls that had sheltered generations of her name? Never!

Miss Ingath waxed pathetic over the ruins of her ancient home, and then grew heroic as she declared that it should *never* be said that she had exchanged the hallowed spot for any man's gold.

In vain Mrs. Nicolson protested and reproached. In vain the minister reasoned and expostulated. In vain the young people teazed, coaxed, jeered by turns. In vain Mr. Nemo offered twice as much as was a reasonable price for Orgert.

Miss Ingath would not be moved.

At last the patience of all was exhausted, and a plan was devised by which it was hoped they would bring her to reason.

## CHAPTER II.

Mrs. Nicolson announced her intention of selling her own half of the house and land, and then Miss Halcro would not only be obliged to act as joint proprietor with the stranger, but would have to allow him to reside at Orgert if it pleased him so to do.

Ingath was too proud to beseech her sister or any one. Moreover, she knew that she was in the wrong from a practical point of view, but she was not measured in her indignation. Mrs. Nicolson, however, remained firm, feeling assured that her sister was

"standing in her own light." It was utterly unreasonable and childishly sentimental, Osla said, to refuse such an offer for a piece of land and an old ruin that did not bring Ingath so much as the bread that sustained her! The money offered by Mr. Nemo would do a great deal more than that, and who but a romantic fool would hesitate! Well! Miss Ingath had her own ideas of what was dignified and lady-like, and when she found that her sister meant what she said, and that she must share Orgert with the eccentric stranger, or agree to a sale, she yielded—yielded with an aching heart, and a bitter sense of wrong done to her by the companion of her life, the sister who had shared all her struggles, and had known her heart more intimately than any other being. Miss Ingath, writhing under the pain of such a blow, coming from such a hand, forgot that the sister had long since been lost in the mother of many children, whose ever-increasing wants were hourly demanding all that mother's time and thoughts.

With few words Miss Ingath finally signified that she agreed, but when the necessary papers were signed, the money paid, and a division to be made, she put her two thin, trembling hands behind her back, threw up her proud head, and said—

"I'll not touch a penny of it. Give it to the children, and never, never speak to me again about that money or this business."

And now we have arrived at the point from which we started, and will proceed with our narrative.

Mr. Nemo was in a hurry to enter into possession, but was civil enough to send a message through the minister, that Miss Halcro might take as much time as she pleased about the moving of her goods and chattels if she would allow him to establish himself in a wing of the house quite away from the rooms which she occupied.

There was no reason why she should object to such a modest and reasonable request, considering that it was in his power to turn her out when he so pleased.

Miss Ingath's personal properties were few and easily removed, but she knew that it would take days, perhaps weeks, to overhaul all the relics (*rubbish*, her nieces called it) which cupboards and boxes contained.

No scrap of writing, no remnant of her departed ancestors, must fall into the ruthless hands of the stranger, or come under eyes less reverential than her own.

It was kind of Mr. Nemo to give her time for that task, and she willingly agreed to his wishes. She even did her utmost to make the few long-disused rooms look habitable for him, and prepared a dainty meal against the hour when he was to arrive.

He had sent his man in the morning, and that person informed Miss Ingath's ancient serving-woman that the master could not abide the sight of women, so he would not trouble the other inhabitants of Orgert. He would use the side door, and in no way cross Miss Ingath's path. When this intelligence was imparted to Miss Ingath she merely remarked, "That is well."

She did not know when the new laird of Orgert arrived; but next morning a deep voice calling a big dog off her flower-beds told her that a master reigned in her old home.

Miss Halcro peeped over her blind, and saw the new laird standing before the side door surveying his domain. He looked not less than fifty years of age, and his dark hair had long since become considerably grizzled. There were deep lines on his face, which, perhaps, misled one in judging of his years, for his brown, muscular hands looked able to do good service yet. Also his shoulders were broad and his figure upright. The man had seen the best of his days no doubt; but his frank, fine-featured face, somewhat concealed by a leonine beard, was not the sort of face that women think belongs to one who despises their sex.

"*This* laird of Orgert is not dissipated," Ingath said to herself, rather bitterly. Then as she watched Mr. Nemo walk with firm, manly steps down the little garden and along the shore, she added more softly—

"He will hold what he wins; ay, and perhaps improve and renovate in such a way that I shall not grieve so very much after all. Ah! if the men of my race had been men like this one!"

Miss Ingath turned away heartsick, and could not bring herself to begin the work that lay before her.

All that day she moved restlessly between her bedroom and the parlour. She did not venture out to pluck a morning nosegay, as was her wont: and she

could not enter one of the solitary chambers waiting for her to come and stir their dead memories.

But when the dusk of evening fell her mind became more settled, and, supposing Mr. Nemo to be buried in his sanctum, she crept into the garden for a few moments. Stooping over her few, but fondly cherished flowers, she would have plucked some, but suddenly remembered that *now* she had no right to do so.

As if guilty of theft Miss Ingath shrank back, flushing crimson, and hurried into the house again, murmuring, "Not mine *now;* oh, not mine!"

She had not known that the recluse was watching her from his window with grave, sad eyes, and a nervous twitching of the lips.

It is a curious fact in the natural history of woman kind, that Miss Ingath did not take any prejudice against Mr. Nemo. On the contrary, her sense of justice led her to feel that he had been less than fairly treated. He had paid far more for Orgert than Orgert was worth, and he was putting himself, no doubt, to much inconvenience that she might not be hurried in any way.

From an ordinary gentleman such civility might have been expected, but from one who disliked ladies, and no doubt had had some good cause to do so, such politeness was exceptional.

"I will not take further advantage of his generosity," she said. "I will begin to-morrow to turn out the things, and once I begin I shall soon get through."

But the beginning was not very easy.

She found herself trembling whenever she tried to open one of the long-closed doors, and a thousand excuses came to prevent her from doing that which makes a thing half done.

Day followed on day, and still Miss Ingath had not set to her task, and old papers, rusty weapons, broken toys, faded dresses, cracked china, family portraits remained untouched.

One morning Miss Halcro was roused early by a great commotion, and presently her maid burst in with intelligence. A number of workmen had arrived, and had been set to work by Mr. Nemo.

They were repairing stone fences, planting bushes, and weeding fields. They had brought cart-loads of furniture, and had been to some of the empty rooms planning what was to be done to them.

Orgert was indeed to be renewed with the new owner, and it was high time that the old order gave place.

"I *must* begin now," Miss Ingath told herself sternly; and straightway she went to what was known as the Yarl's counting-room, where the greater part of the family documents were kept.

With her lips hard set together, spinster Miss Ingath, aged thirty-five, dignified, beyond the age of romance, never touched by that keen sympathy which keeps a heart young for ever, hardened by poverty, made selfish by loneliness—seated herself before the bureau which had been her father's desk, and his father's and grandfather's, and so on back to the time of Odin, if you please to believe it.

Miss Ingath resolutely pulled out a drawer and began to inspect its contents. The first thing that met her eye was a ballad written by her mother when she was a song-loving, song-lilting lassie. Ingath covered it up quickly with a bundle of receipts, and went on with her task. But from a second drawer tumbled a wisp of simmering hair, bright as when it was shorn from some bonnie brow; and beside that lay a bundle of well-worn love letters!

With fingers that shivered as if they were groping among the ashes of the dead, Ingath gathered up the hair and the letters and laid them aside to be burned, wishing with all her heart that some one, ages ago, had been wise enough to do so. No one had ever asked or received a lock of *her* hair. She had never been foolish enough to write a love letter; so Ingath could deceive herself by an assumption of contempt for such tokens of a foolish sentiment. She could even smile and mutter "silly, how silly!" as she turned to her task again. Alas! wrapped in a parchment deed she found a rosette of satin belonging to a baby's christening cap, and from between the folds of an old worm-eaten will dropped a blue scarf tied in a sailor's knot.

The baby had lived to be an old man, a testy, ugly, old man. The sailor, whose ribbon had been so preserved, had been drowned, and his lass had married some one else, and had survived to see her grandchildren's children; and yet—under Miss Halcro's thin hands lay those touching memorials. Not those only. A battered powder flask, a carved tobacco pipe,

a broken sixpence, a baby's shoe, a lady's kerchief, a wedding ring, a boy's spinning top, a child's first copy-book, letters of every kind—tender, wrathful, upbraiding, beseeching, congratulatory, bidding farewell, speaking of speedy reunion. Out of drawers and pigeon-holes came the varied relics, and Miss Ingath could not bear it.

They had been rough, even bad, men—those ancestors of hers; but they had had human hearts, and they had known the passion and the pain of human life. They had all long since become dust and ashes, and the place that had known them would know them no more, but they seemed to live in those relics. All that was prosaic and earthly in their characters had vanished with their personal existence. Only the beauty and poetry of their lives survived in those touching memorials, and this last daughter of their name could not look unmoved upon such tokens.

With a bitter cry, Ingath dropped her hands and face upon the desk and knew not that the eyes of the new laird of Orgert were on her.

## CHAPTER III.

Mr. Nemo had been wandering noiselessly among the disused apartments, and had entered the Yarl's counting-room without being aware that any person was there. He had not meant, we may be sure, to steal upon Miss Halcro's privacy, and if she had not been completely engrossed with her occupation, she could

scarcely have failed to hear him approach. His movements had been quiet, it is true, but she might have heard him come.

The scattered relics and Miss Ingath's attitude told him at a glance what her occupation had been, and what her feelings were. He took one step forward as though he meant to offer sympathy; but a second thought prompted him to withdraw as noiselessly as he had come. So Ingath was not aware that any one had been a witness of her weakness and her pain.

A few minutes later her attention was drawn to the sound of a step echoing through the gloomy passage leading to the room she occupied just then.

And as the step advanced, so also was brought nearer and clearer the notes of a Scottish tune, whistled in a low key as if the whistler's thoughts were at the antipodes. Now, it oddly enough happened, that the tune was one she particularly loved. Years ago she had been wont to sing "Jock o' Hazeldean," and to build castles in the air when she sung it. This favourite song of hers had been caught up by the presumptuous fisher lad, who used to loiter about Orgert at that time, and he used to whistle it as he went about his work in just such a clear tone as now this matter-of-fact recluse, and woman-hater, was doing.

For just a moment Miss Ingath gave a regretful thought to the lover whom she had despised and spurned at the time when she had dreams of more eligible suitors. A memory of Ole's blue eyes dark-

ening with a man's deep love as they rested on her face, went thrilling through her veins, and all the shame she had felt could not smother her womanly exultation in the knowledge that she had been loved. Her cheeks flushed, and she rose quickly from her seat, and as she did so there fell from her lap to the ground a heap of those varied relics of dead passions over which she had been mourning.

But the step and the tune came nearer and nearer, and finally stopped inside the room. How different this man, who must be at least ten years her senior, from the one she was thinking about who had been a baby when she was a child of five!

"I beg your pardon," said Mr. Nemo with well-affected surprise at finding her in the Yarl's counting-room. "I understood that this part of the house was not inhabited."

"No more it is, but there are a few family papers and—things—here that I wished to remove. I will have them all out of—your way very soon now."

"Do not hurry, madam; I am not in any haste. I hope you will consider the house yours as long as ever you wish to remain. By the way, I have observed that you cultivate flowers and understand their science. I wish you would give me your advice regarding the plants most suited to this soil and climate."

"Not much like a woman-hater this!" thought Miss Halcro; and then before she knew exactly what she was doing, or how it came about, she found herself

with Mr. Nemo in the garden talking of flowers and trees.

As they sauntered round and round the tiny beds Mr. Nemo plucked here a blossom, there a leaf, until a very pretty bouquet had been collected in his fingers. Then he spoke, smiling—and I beg you to notice that his smile was a particularly winsome one at all times. Women's smiles are said to do a great deal of damage, but I think that a man's smile, though rarer, is far more potent. Mr. Nemo said, smiling—

"Will you let me give you some of your own flowers?"

Had he been reading her thoughts? Miss Ingath blushed, looking quite youthful at the same time, and remembering her stealthy visit to the garden on the evening of his arrival. She took the flowers, and down in her heart she felt the influence of the man's attractive smile, but she said, sighing—

"I thank you. The flowers are a gift; the garden is not mine now."

"Most certainly yours while you remain at Orgert," was Mr. Nemo's polite reply: "and," he added, "I wish *you* would give *me* some in return."

Miss Ingath hastily gathered the choicest of her poor little collection and put them in his hand.

"You are fond of heaths and orchids and sweet homely Scotch roses, I see," he said, musingly; and she answered—

"They are my favourites."

"You have a good variety. How have you contrived to collect so many in this remote locality?"

"They were collected for me by—a friend—many years ago."

"A very painstaking friend, I should say," said Mr. Nemo, fixing his eyes upon Miss Ingath, who turned away blushing like a school-girl. She could not have told what brought the tell-tale colour to her face. The plants had been brought to her in a very commonplace manner, and had been arranged under her directions in practical fashion, and she had known that the "friend" who gathered them had dreamed many pretty dreams when so employed. We know she had not listened to much of the sailor lad's confession, so what he might have said about his dreams and her flowers was never said. Yet she looked guilty of some soft recollection when the new laird of Orgert alluded to the friend who had been so thoughtful of her tastes.

"Does he still collect for you?" Mr. Nemo asked.

"Oh, no! I have not seen him for years. He was a *humble* friend, the son of my good old nurse. He went abroad and died years ago."

"Oh!" spoken indifferently, for Mr. Nemo was not interested in Ole Harrison, since he found that Miss Ingath's interest was slack.

"You are fond of dogs, I see," he presently remarked.

She was at that moment patting a Newfoundland,

who had sniffed out his master and had joined the couple. "My dog never makes friends with people who are not fond of his kind."

"I had a dog just like him, years ago," replied Ingath. "A dog that I loved as dearly as if it had been a human being."

"Perhaps more dearly," said Mr. Nemo, with his fascinating smile. "Perhaps you loved your dog better than any mere selfish mortal."

The lady glanced quickly at him with a startled air. The dog of whom she spoke had been at her side when she rejected Ole. She was fondling the brute at the time, as if to show her lover how indifferent to his suit she could be; and in the bitterness of his soul the sailor laddie said that he believed she loved the brute better than she would or could any man.

"Dogs are so faithful," said Miss Ingath to Mr. Nemo, not knowing how else to reply, and again he smiled.

"More faithful than men, do you think?"

"I do not know. I have proved a dog but not a man;" and then, thinking it high time to put an end to the interview, Miss Ingath invented an excuse for going indoors after so speaking.

By what I have related of their conversation you will perceive that Mr. Nemo was by no means what he chose to be known as—a woman-hater. From that time he was exceedingly polite, even attentive, to Miss Halcro; and far from avoiding her he rather made excuses for crossing her path pretty frequently.

He was a practical man, and observing that some of the bits of ponderous old furniture would look well among his newer but less picturesque "pieces," he offered to buy whatever Miss Ingath felt inclined to part with. She was delighted with the offer, for she had much dreaded the dispersion of her "household gods," a fate which had appeared inevitable, since Mrs. Nicolson had said that only a part of the furniture could be admitted to the Manse.

Ingath was quite thankful to think that the tottering bureaus, tables, and chairs would remain in their old haunts instead of being kicked about the Manse by the irreverent young Nicolsons: so it was arranged that Mr. Nemo was to keep the furniture.

This gave an excuse for a great many interviews between the couple, and it was surprising how much the spinster lady and the woman-hating hermit found to talk about, and how agreeable to each other they made themselves in a short space of time.

So much civility on the part of Mr. Nemo, of course, had its weight with the lady, and she brought all her powers of self-command to her aid, determined to go through with the task to which she had set herself and rid him of her and her "rubbish."

Each day Miss Ingath cleared out a box, and burned with holy care the greater part of the relics which had been of such value in the sight of eyes long since closed for ever. And as the work proceeded she found her feelings grow less tender. She even learned to smile over some things, and be impatient over

others. She began to feel bitter at thought of those ancestors of hers spending much love and money upon the passion of the hour, and bequeathing no morsel of either cash or affection to the last daughter of their name. Before long, prose smothered poetry, and Miss Ingath ceased to tremble or weep at the sight of those relics of the dead, but proceeded methodically and briskly with her task.

Each evening she took a short stroll out of doors, and it usually happened that the big dog and its master joined her in those walks. But be assured there was nothing sentimental about those "constitutionals," and no one dreamed of commenting upon the matter—so grave and elderly Mr. Nemo looked, so prim and spinsterly seemed Miss Ingath. Their conversation was commonplace, and devoid of compliments on the one hand and self-consciousness on the other.

Mr. Nemo would often talk of what he meant to do with this field, and what he had done with that. He would ask Miss Ingath's opinion about wall paper, and the disposition of furniture. He would solicit her advice regarding hedges and stone fences, until the lady's interest in all his plans for the renovation of Orgert was thoroughly roused, and she entered with zest into his schemes.

Before many weeks had elapsed great changes had been wrought, and the old place had begun to put on a look of home comfort such as it had not worn for many a year.

And Miss Ingath grew reconciled to those changes.

She even rejoiced that Orgert would be again the best house in Sweena, although it no longer belonged to its old owners. Thus a great portion of the bitterness was in a measure taken out of her trouble, and she went on with her indoor task of making way for the new order with less suffering than at first.

Mr. Nemo knew very well how she was employed during those days, and did not fail to evince much sympathy with her, and though the sharpness of her pain had passed away, she was glad of his sympathy. Soon Miss Ingath found herself talking almost confidentially with the new laird about her family history, and those relics which were daily being consigned to the dust to which their owners had returned lang syne.

Said Mr. Nemo on one occasion, "I can quite enter into your sentiments, although I never had a family tree to boast of, or a foot of land to call my own, until I bought this place;" and then he went on to tell how he had risen step by step from a very low position in society, how he had educated himself, and made a fortune by sheer strength of hand and brain.

Looking at him as he spoke, Miss Ingath could not help saying what she honestly felt at that moment, that the man who achieves such success for himself is surely a man to be revered and trusted, as much as the one who sits down in his father's chair and eats the bread

> "Which was never won
> By toil of *his* from the rising sun."

The lady said that in all honesty, but if you had

hinted that she showed scant respect for her old opinions when so expressing herself she would have been much surprised. Or if you had hinted at the possibility of her forming a matrimonial alliance with a self-made man of low degree, I believe she would have repudiated the insinuation with as much scorn as she showed when Ole Harrison made his little blunder.

## CHAPTER IV.

And now it happened, just when Miss Halcro was ready to leave for the Manse, that the young Nicolsons took measles, and a great commotion was raised in consequence.

The room set apart for Auntie was required for the little invalids, and Auntie was very plainly told that if by any means she could delay her coming she would confer a boon upon her sister.

Miss Ingath was not anxious to exchange the quiet of Orgert for the noisy Manse at any time, and particularly was she averse to migrate at measley-time. But she felt some delicacy in trespassing further on the courtesy of the new laird, and would by no means ask a favour of him.

However, Mr. Nemo heard of what had transpired at the Manse, and was pressingly civil in making her welcome to remain where she was. So Miss Ingath remained at Orgert a little longer, and the work of renovation there went on rapidly. Rapidly also went on the acquaintance between the new proprietor and

the old, until that happened which, I suppose, you have expected would happen.

Mr. Nemo took Miss Ingath for a walk one evening as far as the furthest cliffs which girdled Orgert. No young lover could have chosen a more romantic time or place for the avowal of love, and in so doing Mr. Nemo showed his wisdom; for every woman (particularly if elderly) desires a certain halo of romance to surround a proposal.

Miss Ingath was youthful and romantic (notwithstanding her thirty-five years) in matters pertaining to love, because her experience in such affairs was of the least. Age is not measured by years but by experience; therefore, love coming to Ingath Halcro late in life found her young in feeling, and unversed in its lore. More than that, Love took her very much by surprise.

In manly, straightforward words the hermit asked her to remain at Orgert all her days, its mistress and his dear wife. He said he had no fine old name to offer her, but he had what she ought to value more, an honest man's heart to give. He said he did not expect that she could love him with the warmth of a first and youthful attachment, but he would be content with a measure of affection, and would do his best to make her happy.

Then Miss Ingath looked faintly up, and murmured, "I wish you had come when I was younger."

"So do I," he answered, "but since I was fool enough not to find you sooner, you must let me love you twice as much now to make up for lost time."

"Do you really *love* me?" she asked with a certain amount of surprise. Love was altogether associated in her mind with youth. It was linked to the memory of her hot-blooded boy-lover, and she could not believe that a man with grey hair and practical appreciation of a good dinner could be a victim to the tender passion.

"I have loved only one woman in my whole life," said Mr. Nemo, "and that woman I now ask to be my wife."

Pardon Ingath, young people, I beseech you, because at that moment she thought as much of being lady of Orgert as of being Mr. Nemo's wife.

You see she had long since given up thinking of suitors, and was taken by surprise. But the future which his offer opened before her was so much more bright than the one she so lately supposed was her fate, that she was very much inclined to fall in love with him in return. Indeed, there seemed to be only one reason why she should hesitate at all, and that reason she still felt to be a great one. She could not in a moment forget her ancient name and all the associations connected with it. It was true that the men of her family had frequently been selfish in their loves, and had broken the hearts of *humble* women; but no Halcro had ever contracted a low *marriage!*

Many a lady of her name had withered into spinsterhood and died in lonely old age, but ne'er a one had been known to set her affections upon a man of low

degree. Miss Ingath could not all at once overcome the traditions of her house, although she could not help arguing with herself in favour of Mr. Nemo. And one of her principal arguments was that he had no vulgar relatives, and, therefore, few questions would be asked regarding his antecedents. And while she hesitated, argued with herself, feared and wondered, Mr. Nemo urged his suit as a man deeply versed in human nature knows how to do.

He believed with Shakespeare that

> "The man who has a tongue I say is no man,
> If with his tongue he cannot win a woman."

And so with that most subtle and most convincing weapon Mr. Nemo continued to besiege the fair lady's heart, and after a time drew from her a favourable answer—favourable in so far that she said she "would think it over."

Then what rapture was his!

Boys of twenty, you laugh at the loves of elderly folks, but you don't know how much stronger and deeper these are than your sweet little airy fancies that light *here* a moment and *there* the next. When you are "old fogies" then you will experience the truth of what I say; meanwhile believe (and the belief may be consolation to you in some hour of "blighted hopes") that youth possesses the happy faculty of casting care from it, and finding in a new dream comfort for a faded illusion. Middle age, on the other hand, treats dreams as realities, and is so earnest in

absorbing pleasure that it can neither relinquish its desire nor find comfort in change.

But while we moralise, our middle-aged couple are waiting among the rocks with a "proposal" only half settled, and we ought to remember that the dews of evening are supposed to be dangerous to people of their years!

Miss Ingath remembered that fact, and gently suggested it was time they should return to the house.

And now that she had actually heard a confession of love, and had more than half accepted the suitor, she began to find that there was much joy, much sweetness, much rapture in being made the idol of a man's affection.

On that memorable night Miss Ingath returned to Orgert very bewildered, but happy, and almost certain that she was falling (if she had not already fallen) in love, but considerably perplexed how to overcome the prejudices of caste. What would her sister say? What would all her blue-blooded neighbours say? But Ingath's heart, having arrayed itself on Mr. Nemo's side, replied to all such questions by saying to herself, "Osla did not study *your* feelings when the sale of Orgert was arranged, and you are not obliged to study *her* opinions when choosing a husband. As for your neighbours, many a girl, as well as old maid, among them would right willingly exchange her own name for the good-looking, wealthy nobody who wants you for his wife, and who may not unlikely make one

of your lady acquaintances mistress of your old home if you refuse the honour."

These were powerful arguments, but still she hesitated, and sometimes, while pondering the matter, a feeling of pity—a sensation of regret—at the memory of her harshness towards the sailor laddie obtruded itself.

"A fellow feeling makes us wondrous kind," and now that Miss Ingath was herself experiencing some of the pains and penalties of love, she could feel for her young lover of lang syne, and wish she had not been so hard, and so hasty!

Mr. Nemo, meanwhile, suffered none of the agonies of hope deferred. Not he! He had theories of his own regarding love—very odd theories some people would call them. One of those theories was that a man of good physique, ready wit, courteous manners, and pleasant speech cannot fail to wake love in a woman's heart if he makes it plain to her that he loves her. Holding such an opinion, Mr. Nemo was not at all uneasy regarding his courtship.

So, to make a long story short, the wooing was successfully brought to a happy conclusion, and Miss Ingath went to the Manse on the understanding that within a month she must return for good and all to Orgert.

And *now* what think you ought to happen? Ought Ole Harrison to come back like a ghost from the past to reproach her for scorning him and smiling upon the wealthy Mr. Nemo? Ought the sailor lad to return

and condemn the proud heart which would not stoop to his manly love, but would bow low enough for the sake of another man's money? Young Harrison's birth and education had been equal to those of Mr. Nemo. With justice might she not be reproached for her capricious ideas?

Mr. Nemo had been very frank in telling Ingath that his parentage was of the humblest, his name of no account. In fact he said she knew him by a name to which he had no right beyond the right which any man may claim to call himself—"Nobody."

What think you? Shall I bring up the lost lover of her youth to condemn her? No! Ole Harrison as he left Sweena can never come back to it, and Ingath never loved him; therefore, he could have no right to reproach her for anything more than her mode of rejection.

The evening before her wedding day a letter was brought to Ingath. It was brought by Mr. Nemo himself, and he asked her to read it when she was alone that night, and he added—

"You have not told me if you ever loved any one else, nor did I think I had any right to ask such a question; but if the ghost of a young lover can come between us it is better that it come before to-morrow. I am not afraid, for I think I can 'lay' the ghost, so if that letter makes no difference let me see a signal from your window at sunrise, and I will keep my appointment to meet you in church."

Very much surprised and a little alarmed was Miss

Ingath. Indeed, she would have been most considerably frightened if Mr. Nemo had not smiled as he spoke, and given the letter into her hands with the air of a man who feels that his feet are on a rock, and he is powerful to make or unmake his own fortune. His manner reassured her, but, nevertheless, there was a strange flutter at her heart, and as soon as he was gone she hurried to her room to open the mysterious letter.

It was a short one, and written by Mr. Nemo himself, and this was what he said:—

"I told you that I had never loved any woman but yourself. That is true. You told me you had proved the faithfulness of a dog, never that of a man! You shall prove that now.

"My sweet Ingath, pardon the deception I have practised upon you; but I determined I would win you, and I knew no other way of overcoming your scruples. You love me—my own self—of that I am sure, and therefore I am not afraid to tell you the truth at last.

"For your sake I toiled, and strove, and conquered, and rose to a good position in life. To win you for my wife, and to restore to you the home of your fathers, I made an exile of myself for years. I have not come off scathless in the fight, which has been a hard one. I have lost my youth and aged early; but in heart and soul I am still the devoted lover of your youth, and evermore must I be just that.

"I have not been unmindful of your smallest fancies, of even your prejudices, and it was greatly through my influence that the scattered members of your old

nurse's family emigrated to Australia. You have rejoiced, I know, in their prosperity, and will not have one spark of ungenerous feeling in being told that the Harrisons hold a position in the mighty gold land as high as ever the Halcros held in Shetland.

"The minister and your sister know all the truth. It was through Mr. Nicolson that I heard from time to time of you. Be sure, if any other man had come forward as your suitor, I would not have remained hid one day longer. Can you forgive what I have hid from you, and can you meet Ole Harrison at God's altar to-morrow and crown his life with blessing?"

Shame, indignation, wrath, desire for revenge, regret, sorrow, love, fought a great battle in Ingath Halcro's breast that night, but the Master-passion won the fight, as no doubt Mr. Nemo knew it would.

All night long the new laird sat at a high window that looked towards the Manse. Patiently he waited for the first streak of daylight, and when at last the sun rose above the sea beyond Orgert he strained his vision to see if the signal floated from Ingath's window. *Then*, for the first time, a doubt of the result beset him. Pique has been known to overpower love, and pride of birth is a sworn foe to personal affection. Perhaps, after all!——

Ah, no! the woman's heart was true to itself, and the signal was floating from the window. Nay, more; Ingath was there herself waving a white hand as if to show that there were no half-measures in her giving. Fancy what a romantic pair of "old fogies!"

And so Ingath Halcro returned to Orgert, and her children will inherit it. But she speaks little of "blue blood" to them, and even reproves her husband when he ventures to tell his boys that they come of gentle birth, on one side at least.

"Let their boast rather be," says Ingath, the mother, "that they are the sons of a self-made man, whose character is as stainless as that of 'Arthur's Stainless Knight.'"

## *HIS FINIS.*

### CHAPTER I.

"I NE'ER spent a Yule e'en like this in a' my life! No a morsel o' anything by ordinar' in the house to bring in Yule wi'! Alas, alas, that I should hae left my gude faither for a man that grudges even his ain bairn its Christmas ploy. If he had it no', I wadna repine, but when I ken well that he has plenty o' money hid away *somewhere*, it makes my inmost heart burn wi' red wrath! 'Deed, if I but kent where to look for his hoardings I'd help myself and the bairn to what would make our Yule like the Yules o' auld times. O faither, faither! ye never stinted your lassies o' their fun; but ye were no' richt to persuade me to *tell-aff* a bonnie young sailor for our rich auld neighbour. It has been a sair bargain for the silly fule o' a lass that consented to it. Ah, weel! I did no' mind so much while there was but myself to please, for while my jewel of a bairn lay an infant in my arms, I needed no better pleasure than to fondle her. But now that she is a frolicsome lassie looking for her fun like ither bairns, it is hard work I have to

haud my tongue. When she came to us this afternoon and asked if she was to have a *branched candle* and *whipcole* to-morrow, like I've told her I used to have at Yule time, James swore at her for dreaming o' such extravagance, and blamed me sair for putting such thoughts in her head. And I!—I could have cursed him if I were no' feared for his hard hand and harder tongue. Yet, he will have his dram no doubt both this night and to-morrow! Ay, he will enjoy himself after his ain fashion, thinking little and caring less how I fare! If it were no' such a fearful night o' snaw-bearing I'd go to faither's and take Liza wi' me. It's a warm welcome we'd get there on Yule e'en, I know."

The woman paused and listened for a moment to the wind howling around her lonely home. She shivered, and glanced fearfully around the dimly-lighted apartment, while tales of ghosts and evil spirits flitted through her mind as she watched the wavering shadows move upon the walls. Yule e'en is the time when a superstitious, seafaring peasantry believed that the invisible powers of earth and air and ocean were free to revel as they liked among the habitations of man. Unseen beings were supposed to rejoice in the tempest, and to ride upon the snow-wreath or the foam-crested billow. The lonely woman, who all her life long had partially believed in those wild fancies, must be excused for feeling some fear and even awe creep over her as she sat there by herself and heard the voices of the storm utter many a strange sound, which might

well have been the expression of some evil spirit's thought. But, after a time, the thought of her old home, where Christmas joyance was reigning at that moment, rose before her mind and made her forget her fears for a little. Softly and plaintively she began again to murmur her thoughts aloud.

"Mither will be sitting at the chimney nook wi' her best cap on, and her braw blue claith gown and the collar I made for her myself; and faither will be playing on his fiddle—he will be lilting ower the bonnie Foola Reel, and the boys and lassies will be skipping awa' in the dance. Oh! if I had never left my faither's house! oh, if I were there now! But I dare not go across the moor on such a night—unless the moon was to come up, and the snow stop—and that winna be. *He* will not be home for hours—maybe not to-night—if he has mair than one dram at the store; and a bonny home-coming it will be at the lang and the last o' it! Dare I take Liza from her warm bed out into the cauld? Oh, no! Yet to think o' them all at Skairpa hadden hearty, and *I* here in auld James Gertson's dreary house my lane!"

The poor pretty creature's tears flowed fast, and rising sadly she crossed the cottage, opened the door, and peered wistfully into the darkness. The ground was thickly covered with snow, and more was falling in fitful showers, while over the hill swept moaning winter winds. Not far below the brae upon which the cottage stood, the turbulent North Sea dashed against a craggy shore, and the roar of its breakers

mingled grandly with the wild voices of the gale. As the young wife gazed tearfully out, and mentally contrasted her present condition with that which had been hers in the happy olden time, there flashed across the storm-vexed water a gleam of light, followed by the faint though distant report of a gun at sea.

"Some puir ship in trouble," sighed Breeta. "Thankful am I that *he* is ower the hill at this moment, for, had he been within hearing of yon call for help, it's like he would hae served those puir fellows as he has served mony another ship's crew."

Again the flash and boom were borne to her, and she shuddered as she ejaculated—"It is awful! awful! I think the evil powers are truly having a' their ain way this night." Breeta folded her hands and murmured a prayer, and, so fortified, strove to peer into the distance in search of the distressed vessel. But she could see nothing but the vexed ocean, and at intervals the gleam of light which preceded the sound of the minute gun.

"Heaven grant that James stay away this night!" Breeta said aloud. "I wished for even *his* company no' lang ago, for the loneliness was mair than I could bear; but, now I pray he may no' come this side the hill till at least yon ship is out o' sight. Oh! if I but dared to tell James what I think, what I more than suspect of his evil tricks! If I but dared to brave his fury, and leave him for ever! If I could but face the shame and scandal of the Isle, and go hame to my faither! But, *he* said if I did do that, I

should never see my bairn again. Yes! when the blood was hot in me, and I cried that I would go to faither, he spoke such words as made me feel that I had no' the power o' myself any more. Ah, James Gertson—cold, selfish brute—knows how to tame a hot-hearted lass when he has her child in his grasp. And yet, I think I hate him less, because my Liza is his daughter. Oh!"

The ejaculation was forced from Breeta's lips by the sudden appearance of her husband, who was standing not far from her—certainly near enough to have overheard the wrathful words she had uttered, believing herself alone. He was not an ill-looking man, but advanced in life, and certainly no fit match for the blooming girl who had been tempted by his reputed wealth into putting her fate into his hands. There was a harsh expression on every feature, and a strange dark look in his eyes—such a look as never dwells in the glance of a man whose every action can bear the closest inspection. It is true that men may wear a mask so close-fitting that they can for the most part defy the whole world to see what lies behind it; yet, in a bad man's *eyes* the keen observer cannot fail to read something of the true character which is so carefully shrouded in every other way. The very reserve, the "on guard" expression of the soul's sure interpreters, reveals the truth as much as an evil deed would do. James Gertson's eyes did not belie him. He did not speak when his trembling wife uttered that "Oh!" He merely looked at her with the

strange light in his eyes intensified, until she felt it sinking into her very soul.

Shrinking together, and feeling the life-blood slowly chilling in her veins as that dark glance became more and more fixed and fearful, Breeta yet strove to break the oppressive silence. She felt sure that her husband had overheard her not very flattering words regarding himself, and the courage which besets the weakest creature on earth when it finds itself trapped and brought to bay gave Breeta strength to speak. "Ye started me, James," she said, "I did not hear you coming, for the snow dills every sound." He made no reply, only continued regarding her with a fixed stern gaze; and, shrinking within the doorway, Breeta murmured—"It is very cold, very! are you coming in doors, just now?" Still no word spake Gertson, and a dread of she knew not what crept over Breeta as, raising her voice, she said—"Do you hear me speak to you, James? Are you coming in, or shall I shut the door?"

Never a word from James! never a movement of lip or brow!—only that fixed gaze! Yet, though he had not moved one step forward, it seemed to Breeta that he had approached much nearer to her in some mysterious way. "He must be drunk or in a sleep," she thought. Yet a certain awe stole over her as she looked at him. There came just then a sudden lull in the storm as if the tempest-fiend was preparing to gather all his strength for a yet wilder onslaught upon tortured Nature; and in that pause there came once more across the wild

water a flash of light followed by the sullen boom of the minute gun. One is often bolder in the extremity of fear than when courage is at its best. Breeta, beset by many terrors, turned at that moment to her husband, and cried beseechingly—"O James! have pity *this time* and help yon poor ship. Remember this is Yule e'en, that should be the blessed time o' a' the year. Have mercy as ye hope for it when ye stand before God!"

Gertson's eyes had never turned from her. He did not move or speak; and, spell-bound, Breeta put out her hand and laid it on his arm. Was it an arm? *what* was it? Nothing palpable met her touch. Almost mad with terror, Breeta flung up both hands to push the horror from her—for *it* seemed to draw nearer and nearer—but her arms only beat the empty air. There was nothing there, no one near. Yet her eyes were on the semblance of James Gertson, her husband, standing as he had done all the time looking fixedly at her.

In the mythology of Hialtland there is a class of spirits known by the name of the Finis. "Those beings appear before a death, personating the individual who is to die. Sometimes they are seen by the person himself, sometimes by his friends, more often by *unchancie folk*. Certainly the term Finis is identical with that word which appears at the end of a volume, the Finis being the apparition which appears before death—before the end." I have quoted the above to explain to my readers what may appear incompre-

hensible to them—namely, the cry which Breeta gave when she found that speech or touch could not reach her ghostly companion.

"His Finis!" she shrieked, and fell fainting on the snow.

## CHAPTER II.

"An evil hour in which to return home, and a sorry plight to be in!" muttered a young sailor, as he clung to the rail of his dismantled ship, and knew that she was driving on the rocks of his native island. "I turned my back on the auld place because the lass I loved chose money rather than me! She told me one Yule e'en that she loved me. O God! I can at this moment, even, this awful moment, dwell upon that time. How sweet and tender she looked, and how brightly her wet eyes shone as she lifted them to mine, and I read her love by the light of the stars gleaming on her bonnie upraised face! Such a girlish, innocent face! That was *one* Yule e'en; next Yule she *telled me aff;* and *this* Yule I am like to be flung like a bit of seaweed upon the shore below her home. *There* is a light—a lonely light. That ought to be the light from old Gertson's house. Ay, and doubtless Breeta sits warm by his hearthstone, laughing in his face and playing with his child. She little dreams that the lad whose lips pressed hers for the first time, and for the last, on happy Yules not long ago, is tossing on the dark sea outside her door—his hours numbered most like. She

will wake up to merry Yule to-morrow, and will pledge *him* in the jolly Yule cup. She will wear her prettiest dress, and deck her soft hair for his pleasure. She will perhaps run to the shore with her bairn to gather shells and bright glossy brown and green weeds to deck her cottage. And perhaps she will find my battered corpse among the tangles! Well, ill as she used me, dear lassie, I hope the sight of my dead face may no' vex her too much. And if she do but lay her rosy mouth to the brow she has so often fondled in life, I shall know, though dead, that she has done it. I shall know and be glad. Roar away, sea and wind! Break upon the hard-hearted rocks and shriek to the heavens! What need I care? 'The sooner it's over the sooner to sleep,' says the song. So be it. This poor old ship will be at your mercy before very long."

The young man's thoughts were at that moment interrupted by a comrade, who laid a heavy hand on his shoulder and said—

"Can you tell what that light is? You ought to know."

Yaspard's eyes were still directed towards the home of his lost love, and he answered rather absently—

"There is no anchorage—no refuge—near that house. I know the coast near it well."

Said the other—"I did not mean the steady light in yon window, man. I meant that flare-up to the right. Look!"

Yaspard looked in the direction indicated, and then answered with a savage laugh—

"The weather must be too much for even the Devil, and he has gone into the deserted Ha' for shelter. No human hand can have waked a light there. None but the Devil would seek shelter in that haunted, murder-stained ruin. Yes, yon must be an illumination of his Satanic majesty's own contriving, for don't you see the flame turns green and serpent-shaped?"

"Don't be a fool, Yaspard," said the other roughly. "This is no time for nonsense; but if you, who are the only one on board that knows the coast, can tell us what to do, do so without delay."

"If the ship," replied Yaspard, "was not beyond our control I might be able to cheat the Devil of his prey, for I do know every rock on this coast, every light along the Isles, every harbour within hail. But it is of no use. We can't guide our ship into harbour *now*."

The mate turned away, and Yaspard, once more left to himself, muttered—

"Perhaps the Devil has turned wrecker, like old James Gertson, and means to have the credit of our destruction. He might have saved himself the trouble of lighting a false beacon. Our ship will soon be drawn upon the rocks without that. Surly welcome ye give your sons, old Isle! But we will meet the perils of your coast as Hialtlanders should."

On drove the ship, and her crew could only stand helplessly waiting for the moment when she would strike. All had been done that human power could do. There was nothing more to be done but to leave

their lives in the hand of Him who is the giver of life. And then—when Breeta fell lifeless on the threshold of her home—young Yaspard's ship was dashed to pieces within a stone's throw of the spot where the girl lay.

There was a terrible struggle for life among the breakers, each man for himself. Some the sea carried into its depths; some had the breath beaten out of them in an instant; a few gained the land unharmed, and foremost among that fortunate few was Yaspard. Tossed on some sand by a huge billow, he rose and fought his way to firm ground like a young sea-god. Flinging the rude surf from his brown locks, he planted his feet beyond the tide-mark, and won his life from the ocean's clutches.

Then instinctively he turned to the light which he knew, and, bounding up the little brae, almost stumbled over the prostrate figure of his darling.

"God, what is the matter? Is she dead?" he cried, and lifting Breeta in his arms carried her into the cottage, calling at the same time upon James, who Yaspard never doubted must be not far off. Only a child's frightened cry responded to the young man's impatient shout; but *that* sound did what neither the voice of love nor of hate could do. It thrilled through Breeta's ears, and woke her to partial consciousness. Opening her eyes to look for the child, she saw her former lover bending over her!

"Another Finis!" she screamed in terror.

"No, no," Yaspard exclaimed. "I am alive, never

doubt that. I've been shipwrecked close by. But what has happened here? Where is James Gertson?"

At the mention of her husband Breeta shuddered and closed her eyes as if to hide from some fearful vision, and Yaspard was quick to observe the action.

"How came you to be alone on Yule e'en?" he asked hastily. "Breeta, darling, try to calm yourself. You look very ill. And, oh, do tell me what is wrong. If *any one* has ever dared to speak a hard word to you I'll——. Speak, dear, and tell me what has happened."

But Breeta could only wring her hands and wail—"The Finis! the Finis!" and Yaspard, perplexed how to act, could only stare at her silently—as the Finis had done.

How long they might have continued to act and not act in such a manner cannot be conjectured, for in a few moments the survivors from the wreck rushed in, and at the same moment a tiny, white robed creature appeared from the inner room. Liza had tired of waiting for her mother to answer to her call, and now sprang into Breeta's arms, rousing her at once to keen participation in the present.

"Where is the goodman of the house?" the sailors asked, but before Breeta could collect herself sufficiently to reply, Yaspard answered for her—

"The goodman is out—most like over the moor buying Yule dainties. There is no accommodation for us *here;* but I know that this girl's father will receive us right heartily, and his house is not very far away

—only a short tramp across the hill, lads. I will guide you there, for you see for yourselves Mrs. Gertson is in no condition to attend to us."

"I'll stay where I am," exclaimed the Captain. "I was nearly battered to bits among the rocks, and there is room for one at least by this fire. The bonnie young mistress, ill though she be, won't grudge a half-drowned chap a bit of her hearthstone."

"Oh yes, stay—do stay," Breeta eagerly cried. "I could not be left alone. I should die o' fear. Oh, what can ha'e happened to *him?*"

The men stared at her in amazement.

"Do you think," Yaspard asked, "anything has happened to your—to James Gertson?"

"I fear sae," she whispered, gazing fearfully around the room. "He went over the hill this afternoon, and he has not come hame, and, oh dear, what shall I do? I—I ha'e seen—oh, I ha'e seen his Finis!"

Sailors are all superstitious, and Breeta's hearers, although scarcely believing that the Finis had "appeared," yet felt somewhat uncomfortable at her words. Said Yaspard to the frightened girl—

"I will take my comrades to your father's house, and after that I will go and inquire about James Gertson. I will return as soon as possible. Meanwhile I am sure our Captain will take care of you."

She glanced timidly at Yaspard, who could not trust himself to look back into the eyes which had been so full of love for him last time they met his

own. He turned away, and followed his comrades out of the cottage, and in a moment Breeta was left alone with the Captain and her child.

"Cheer up, my woman," said the sailor. "You have got a fright. No wonder, sitting all alone on such an eerie night. But you must not let your morbid fancies run away with you. Your husband may have met some friends, and they will have persuaded him to linger with them. This is a holiday time recollect, and a man must have a bit freedom on such occasions. He will return safe and sound before long."

Breeta shivered, and clasped Liza more tightly, but made no reply to the Captain's well-intentioned remarks. And still the snow fell heavily, the winds screamed, and the billows clamoured as they broke upon the shore.

The Captain, receiving no response to his attempts at cheering Breeta, made himself comfortable in a big arm chair, and soon began to doze over the fire.

Liza, cuddled to her mother's bosom, fell into a soft sleep; and the hours fled on, and Breeta sat motionless and bewildered, striving to think, yet afraid to think.

And James Gertson did not return to his home; nor did Yaspard come back, as he had promised to do.

The snow and the wind and the sea continued their wild warfare without the cottage; within, the girl-wife waited.

## CHAPTER III.

"TAKE something pretty home to my wife, or a parcel o' sweets to the bairn! They said *that* at the store to tempt me to part with my siller! Tempt me! Every day is no Yule day! Yule fiddlesticks! I am not such a fool. Dainty fare is soon finished: fine feathers make fools proud. No! no! James Gertson knows better how to guide his gear."

It was James Gertson who thus soliloquised as he slowly plodded through the snow in a half-drunken condition. He had loitered about the store until the doors were closed for the night; and then, as no man loved him well enough to ask him to remain, or offered to go home with him, Gertson betook himself to the hill, talking to himself, as tipsy men are so fond of doing.

"Ay, I ken how to keep my siller; no landlord's oakchest, no bank, no ship, no land for my money! Chests have chinks, and banks can break; land needs labour, and ships sink at sea; but the bright gold and silver neither melt nor lose when hid in a safe place by a wise man. And mine is easy come by too, easy won! Oh! the delight of counting it ower, and knowing that no person but myself knows, or ever will know, where it is kept so safely! I can go any night and count my treasure, and not a human being in the Isle would ever dream of looking for me or it *there*. When my light is seen the fools say that the ghost of

the murdered Laird is haunting his ruined home. Even by day they shun the place. Ghostly lights, indeed! That little candle o' mine has served a double purpose many a time. It has scared the folk from the neighbourhood, and it has lured many a ship into missing her reckoning. My money bags have been most enriched by what the sea brought them; and now any idiot shopkeeper or half-drunk fisherman to think that *I* would spend one coin o' such sweetly coft money upon Yule pleasures! Ha! ha! But didn't I contrive cleverly to get my twa or three drams without paying for them? The man ahint the counter thought that *I* would open my purse strings if I got the whisky, and sair disgusted they looked when I gaed off without spending a brown copper. Oh, ay, James Gertson knows how to circumvent folks! He knows how to keep the cash together, and belike he'll teach his wife to do the same. She is her faither's favourite bairn, so there will be a good slice of *his* gear coming my way before long. It was rare carrying off that young braggart's sweetheart after all. The young fellows laugh at me and call me 'old miser'; and Yaspard, boastful boy, vain of his pretty face, and confident because of his youth, told me in plain words what he thought of me. Yet *I* got the lass, and he was jilted! His handsome face weighed light against my money!—woman's ways all the world over that! Much they care for love kisses if the man that gives them cannot pour money into the little hands at the same time! Soft hands that know

how to scratch, though, when the gold and silver run short. Well! well! Breeta thought she would get mony a braw gown and trinket, and never need to work when she married James Gertson. She is no' the first lass that has made a mistake of that sort. Serve them right! I hope that they will always find that old men, with the savings of a lifetime to the fore, are not fools. Yule ploys! That is what a' body is after to-night, while I am——— But stay, I think I may as well have a ploy like the rest, after all, only *my* ploy shall be the rarest, finest, most exciting of them all. I'll go and count my money again! It is a wild night! a wild night! and a time when ships like to find a harbour. Sailors believe that the devils are doubly devils on Yule e'en out of spite, because their power became restricted one Christmas day long ago. We shall see! Mayhap my candle may bring me a gude Yule feast from the sea—even to-night.

Chuckling and muttering to himself in this fearful manner, Gertson turned aside and made for the deserted Ha'. The whisky had confused him sufficiently to prevent his walking in a straight line, and the snow falling thickly added to the confusion of his mind, so that he spent a long time in reaching his destination. Yet reach it he did, for his treasure was like a loadstone, and not even his half-intoxicated condition could prevent him from finding his way to the desire of his soul. The ruin was roofless, but some of the lower rooms were still somewhat sheltered, although dreary

enough to scare even sheep and ponies from seeking refuge in them.

Gertson had stowed away in a hole of the wall a small box with some matches and candles. After procuring a light he went to a heap of stones carelessly piled in a corner of the room, and, lifting some of the blocks aside, disclosed a small vault. Stooping over the opening he dived his arms into it, and drew out two bags of money. They were not very small bags, and were well filled. It cost him an effort to raise them. Sitting down on the damp floor, with the candle placed on a window-sill overhead, Gertson spread out his hoard, and counted the shining coin slowly. One, two, three, &c., &c., &c. He whispered the figures in a tender tone like a mother counting the curly heads of her sleeping darlings. He touched each one as a girl touches the fingers of her lover as they stray over her cheek and hair—lingeringly, lovingly. And as he counted and caressed the money, he spread it on the ground, where it shone with the subdued splendour which belongs only to gold and silver.

Having satisfied himself that no single coin was wanting, Gertson arranged it in tiny heaps, the sixpences by themselves, shillings, half-crowns, half-sovereigns, sovereigns, ditto. Then each heap was divided again. So many sixpences make so many shillings; so many shillings make so many pounds. Oh, it was a "ploy" indeed to that sordid miser to arrange and re-arrange his ill-gotten wealth!

After spending some time in this manner, Gertson

found that even the sight and feel of his treasure could not keep out the cold; and that the chill wind, combined with the spirits he had imbibed, was numbing his faculties as well as his flesh. Reluctantly he returned the money to its bags; reluctantly he moved towards the vault to replace them muttering as he did so, "The murdered laird's dry bones, lying in his ain wine cellar, keep good watch over my treasure. I give it again to your care, with a benediction, old man!" And with a horrid grin, Gertson lowered the bags into the vault. As they touched the ground they rattled against the skeleton of the long-since murdered man.

That superstitious fears had no power over old Gertson on ordinary occasions, and when he was in full possession of all his senses, we can readily believe. He would never have chosen that place for his "bank" if he had credited one of the many stories told about the Ha'. But as we have seen, he, on the contrary, traded on the superstitious awe of his neighbours, and laughed in his sleeve. When he heard the noise made by his money bags as they descended among the dry bones, Gertson chuckled again, and leant over the opening, muttering as he did so—"Yes! yes! a safe bank this, and a trusty keeper yon grim skeleton! Luck played me a good turn when it whispered that if I dared come here I would fare well. The fools that closed this vault over the dead laird, leaving him to rot under the ruins of his home without even a coffin to cover his remains, thought, doubtless, that they left him to

a rest as undisturbed as any that dead men enjoy in Christian burying grounds! Ha! ha! and they say that his spirit haunts the Ha'; and they know not that old James Gertson's money shares the laird's sepulchre! If they did! If they did!"

At that moment something glittering down in the vault caught Gertson's eye; and his heart, ever fearful over its treasure, throbbed at the thought of a golden piece having by some mischance rolled out of a bag, or perhaps the bag had burst or opened, and the precious coins might escape. The miser thought of his sovereigns and shillings as if they were sentient beings who could move away if it so pleased them when a loophole of escape was given; and in much trepidation he stooped and stretched his hand towards the object. That hand was clutched fiercely by *something*—sharp teeth or fleshless fingers! A yell of mingled terror and wrath burst from his lips, and by one great effort he freed his hand from the grip of the invisible assailant.

There is a power stronger than even the ruling passion of a strong man, and that power had complete control of Gertson—both soul and body—then. That power is conscience, which "makes cowards of us all;" and *it* could conjure up a more horrible phantom than any vulgar fear of the supernatural had ever been able to do. Why conscience had never scared the man till that hour we know not, and never can know. Forgetful of everything but the eager desire to escape from some awful enemy sent from the unseen world to

torment him, the old man staggered forth into the darkness, the wind, and the driving snow. Whither he went he knew not; what happened to money or ought else he cared not. His mind was completely off its balance for the time being, and he imagined himself pursued by demons. The candle flared up and burned itself out. The vault remained gaping; and round and round about the ruin James Gertson wandered, unknowing where he went. He was quite bewildered, terrified, and insane. At last he sank exhausted into a snow wreath, and was soon shrouded in its icy folds.

## CHAPTER IV.

YASPARD conducted his companions to the house of Breeta's father, where they were hospitably received as he had affirmed they would be. Although the young sailor needed rest himself, he could think of nothing but his promise to Breeta, and lost no time in acquainting her relations with what she had said regarding her husband. There was nothing selfish in Yaspard's eager desire to be of use to her in her present anxiety. He believed, from what he had seen of the poor girl's fear and grief, that she loved James Gertson with all the devotion of a true wife; therefore Yaspard proved his own affection to be of a very high order, when he determined to restore her husband in safety to her—if that was possible.

The few words spoken to Breeta's father served to rouse anxiety on Gertson's account, and soon all the

young men of the hamlet were out in parties of two and three, inquiring for the missing man. But he was nowhere to be found. The storekeeper said that James had left for home early in the evening, and no one had seen him since. The searchers called at every house on the way, and within a radius of some miles; but Gertson could not be traced, and at last the men were obliged to come to the sad conclusion, that he must have been lost in the snow. They carried lanterns and shouted as they walked, but the man they sought made no response, and at last Yaspard ventured to tell his companions (Breeta's brothers) what Breeta had said about seeing a wraith.

"His Finis been seen! why did ye no tell us sooner? What use in us to seek for a dead man? Dead, he can wait till morning." By that speech you will perceive that the young men entertained very little affection for their brother-in-law, and that they believed in the apparition which Breeta averred she had beheld.

"I don't know how I can face her," said Yaspard. "How can I go back with no tidings of him? I promised Breeta I would bring news of her poor husband."

"Ye think she will be overwhelmed with grief, do ye?" said one of the brothers with a grim smile; and the other added, "Perhaps she would have had a much sorer heart if it had been yourself, and you had been lying drowned and dead upon the shore! I have not forgot—though you, Yaspard, seem to have no re-

collection of past days—the Yule e'en not many years ago when you were Breeta's wooer, and one she liked well."

"Stop!" Yaspard cried sternly, "remember you speak of your sister, and that we are now searching for her husband. Let the shadow of death, if nothing else will, bridle your tongue, man. Such words are not seemly."

"It is a vain search we are upon," replied Breeta's brother, "a hopeless search! and we may as well go on to Gertson's house now, since we are nigh it. In the morning perhaps some clue to his whereabouts may be found." Then the three young men turned towards the lonely dwelling where Breeta sat waiting.

Her feelings towards her hard, unloving husband, had been considerably softened since fears for his safety had arisen. Also, perhaps, Gertson's little daughter, clinging fondly to Breeta's bosom, bespoke the woman's forgiveness and love for its father, seeing that in almost every case,

"The child, too, clothes the father with a dearness not his due."

And Breeta was not a girl of resentful cast of mind.

When her brothers and Yaspard came in, their grave looks said that her fears had been too well grounded, and she could not ask a question. Yaspard was the first to speak. He said, "James Gertson should have been here long ere now. I fear he has not come in our absence?" Breeta shook her head in answer. "We cannot think where he has

gone," said one of the brothers, "we fear he has missed his way." "And," added the other, "it is useless to search more to-night; one might as well look for a needle in a bundle of hay and expect to recover it, as hope to find a lost wanderer on the hill or moor to-night."

"And if ye found him," Breeta cried wildly, "it would be of no use. He will come in by this door never mair unless carried! I hae seen his Finis! Oh puir man! puir man! Lord hae mercy on his soul!" And Breeta conducted herself generally as a loving wife, and as an inconsolable widow should.

Yaspard could not stand the sight of her grief, and he went out to hide his own emotion. As he stood under the shelter of the cottage eaves a strange train of thought suddenly brought back to his mind the light he had seen in the ruined Ha'. He was an intelligent young man, and had seen enough of the world beyond his mystery-girdled native land, to scoff at the superstitious fancies of his countrymen. Although he had talked to himself on board ship of Satan lighting a lure in the deserted habitation, he yet believed that it was no fiend, but a man who did so; and in the instant that the recollection of what he had seen flashed back on his mind, he thought also, "it must have been James Gertson who lit that signal. It must have been the old man, long suspected of following the savage pursuit of 'wrecking,' who had sought refuge in the old Ha'."

Just then a party of searchers arrived to report their utter failure.

"Men," said Yaspard, "I have reason to believe that Gertson was in the ruined Ha' this evening. Come with me, and I believe we will find the old man there."

A laugh from some, and a frightened negative from others, greeted Yaspard's speech; but, nothing abashed, he briefly explained his reasons for supposing that James must be there, and in spite of their superstitious fears he succeeded, by adroitly hinting that very likely they would find the miser's hoard in the ruin, in persuading the party to accompany him to the place. Trimming their lanterns afresh, and screwing up their courage with the thought of discovering Gertson's long-kept secret, the men, headed by Yaspard, started for the Ha'.

How lonesome and grim it looked standing so forlorn among the snow wreathes! It did require no little amount of courage to pass through the broken doorway into the silent desolation within. Yaspard flashed his lantern around the dark chamber into which the party had stumbled, and then he discovered the candlestick left by Gertson on the window ledge. At the same moment one of his companions found Gertson's hat, which had fallen off when he was struggling to free himself from the horrid grip of his unknown foe. All dread of the supernatural vanished, and the men eagerly inspected the place, taking for granted that they would certainly find James there.

"There!" cried Yaspard, "there! He is hiding in that corner!"—and springing forward the young man stooped over what he had taken for Gertson. But, instead, a large and fierce otter snarled at him, causing the young sailor to draw back in surprise. Taking advantage of his momentary fear, the beast glided past, and made good its retreat before any of the men could stop it.

"A nice companion for the old man that!"—laughed one of the lads; and once more the search for Gertson was renewed. They were not long in discovering the vault, and its appearance showed that some one had quite recently disturbed the stones which had been once carefully piled over the spot where so long ago the murdered laird's remains had been found and left.

"Just like the old miser to choose such a place for a money box," Yaspard exclaimed. "I believe we shall find his hoard down there."

One of the men suggested that perhaps Gertson was hiding in the vault, or had fallen in. They all bent over the opening and peered down; but though it was not very deep the vault was wide, and they could not see into it from above. Anxious as they were to discover all that was to be discovered, they yet shrank from exploring further, until Yaspard volunteered to jump down into the vault. Lantern in hand he slid down and crashed among the laird's bones and Gertson's money bags!

Nothing daunted, the bold young sailor swung his lamp about, and satisfied himself that James was not

there. But his name on the bags of money proved who was their owner, and that he *had* been on the spot. The bags were lifted up, the vault reverently closed over the dead man's remains, and the search continued.

Vain search! Yaspard carried the money to Breeta, and told the story. Yet it was left unfinished, for he had also to tell that James Gertson had not been found, though his treasure had.

Yule morning dawned! By that time the storm had abated, and Breeta's parents had come to her. Soothed and fondled by the dearest, truest friends that this world can bestow upon a woman, the young wife became composed enough to tell coherently about the Finis which she had seen, and no one except Yaspard doubted for one moment that James had died at that hour. But Yaspard had unravelled one superstitious belief that night, and he was not likely to accept another, though told so circumstantially by Breeta. He believed that it was Gertson's self in flesh and blood that she had seen, and that the old man had stolen away to the Ha' after giving his wife a fright.

Yule day was not such a *very* hard, sad, lonely one as Breeta had anticipated. When a woman's *heart* is not deeply concerned in a loss such as she had sustained, there is a certain dreary comfort in being the centre of attraction for the time being.

Sisters, brothers, friends, and above all, parents, hovered about the pretty young widow, offering her such solemn attentions as seemed fitting; and fre-

quently Yaspard stole in during the day, and cast a sympathetic glance at her. More than once Breeta caught herself thinking that her affliction was not altogether so bad as such things are usually considered, and that there was a certain comfort in feeling that James Gertson would frown on her no more. In spite of womanly regret, she could not help dwelling upon his harshness and want of love, and feeling that he claimed little grief from her. She said to herself that she had learnt a lesson she would not soon forget. She would go home to her father's house, and never leave it again. No, not though the best man that ever her eyes beheld should wish it. Gertson's money would be Liza's, and it should make a lady of the little lass, and they would live happily together, they twain, mother and child, and——with a guilty start, Breeta checked her thoughts, and looked up almost expecting, with terror, to see James Gertson darken the doorway, which was filled at the moment by some one. But it was not her husband who stood there, only Yaspard, and he said solemnly, "The lads and I have been out searching again. We felt sure we must discover something before long. We have found it in a snow wreath close by the old Ha'." He paused and looked away from Breeta, whose face had paled as he spoke. Then her father said softly—"They ha'e laid it in the Ha' till they brought word what you wished done. Breeta, my bairn, shall they bring it here?"

Breeta sighed and wept and said—"*It* is welcome, of course. But, maybe, faither, *It* should stay there

till"—— Her father understood the half-uttered desire of James Gertson's widow, and the old miser was borne next day from the ruined Ha' straight to the churchyard.

Breeta went home with her mother, and wore her weeds for the orthodox twelvemonth. At the end of that time "the best man her eyes ever beheld," namely, Yaspard, persuaded her that it would be much wiser to spend all coming Yules with him in a home which he had got ready for her. And Breeta never repented agreeing to her bonnie sailor's proposal.

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